

THE NO.1 MAGAZINE FOR PLAYSTATION

PLAY

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→ EXCLUSIVE ACCESS
**CALL OF DUTY
MODERN
WARFARE II**

Is this the best campaign yet?
How COD levels up shooters

→ THE VERDICT
**THE LAST OF
US PART I**

PS5's gorgeous remake
leads 19 pages
of reviews

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How does the Bat Family
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co-op caper?

→ EXCLUSIVE ACCESS
GENSHIN IMPACT

How the huge, free, open-world RPG just keeps getting better

THE EVOLUTION OF
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REQUIEM

HANDS-ON WITH
EXOPRIMAL: DON'T
CALL IT DINO CRISIS

PS5'S DUALSENSE
GOES (EVEN MORE)
PREMIUM



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→ WELCOME TO HELL-A
**DEAD ISLAND 2
RISES AGAIN**
Does the long-awaited
sequel live up to the hype?



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(02) 8227 6486
www.techmags.com.au
future@crmaus.com.au

Future Publishing Australia, PO Box Q1179
Queen Victoria Building, Sydney, NSW 2000
Corporate Web: www.futureplc.com

Editorial

Editor: **Shaun Prescott**
shaun.prescott@futurenet.com
Creative Director: **Troy Coleman**
troy.coleman@futurenet.com

Contributors

Malindy Hetfeld, Luke Kemp, Rachel Watts
Daniel Lipscombe, Aaron Potter, Alan Wen
Oscar Taylor-Kent, Jessica Kinghorn, Troy Coleman,
Harry Domanski

Photography

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Management

Managing Director: **Neville Daniels**
Sales Director: **Paul Marttila**
paul.marttila@futurenet.com

International

PLAY is available for licensing. Contact the International
department to discuss partnership opportunities
International Licensing Director **Matt Ellis**
matt.ellis@futurenet.com

Management

Managing Director **Neville Daniels**

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Welcome



the question lingers in my mind: why?

Granted, if it was just the PS3 version of The Last of Us, you’d quickly be forgiven for demanding a remake. But the PS4 remaster, last time I checked (last month) still looks brilliant. So what gives?

The fact that Sony has a new The Last of Us TV adaptation in the works was likely a motivating factor. Though there’s every possibility that Naughty Dog just wanted to make their masterwork look prettier, and that’s ok too. But possibly the most relevant consideration for people who buy and play

The new remake of The Last of Us Part I has arrived so quickly after its PS3 original that it’s giving me whiplash. I started it up sceptically, played for a few hours, found myself enjoying it, but still

games is: should I buy and play this game? If you’ve never played The Last of Us and have a PS5, the answer is “definitely, go do it now”.

On the other hand, if you own the PS4 version (which is backwards compatible on PS5), it’s a more complex matter. Hear me out, but I feel like there’s value in preserving in games the spirit of the time in which they were released. The Last of Us is undoubtedly a landmark game, and in many ways the new remake carries the baggage of its 2013, generation-straddling origin. It has lost some of the graphical quirks and tells of that era, resulting in a weird hybrid that, while undoubtedly fresh to a newcomer, has an uncanny, inconsistent effect to the returning player. It looks amazing, but its rhythm, it’s *vibe*, feels bygone.

There’s all that, which are niche concerns probably. But perhaps I’m just a tad bitter that Bloodborne hasn’t been remade. C’mon Sony. Please. I’m begging you.

Shaun Prescott
EDITOR

PLAYING
Disgaea 6
FAVE BIRD
Black cockatoo

“PLEASE REISSUE BLOODBORNE, SONY”

THIS MONTH’S PONDEROUS PONTIFICATORS



Troy Coleman
CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Birds are cool, great even, but aeroplanes - also things that can fly - are better. So says Troy, who once thought he was growing feathers and is now frightened of birds.
PLAYING
Diablo II: Resurrected
FAVE BIRD
Aeroplanes



Dan Gardiner
AUTHORITY FIGURE

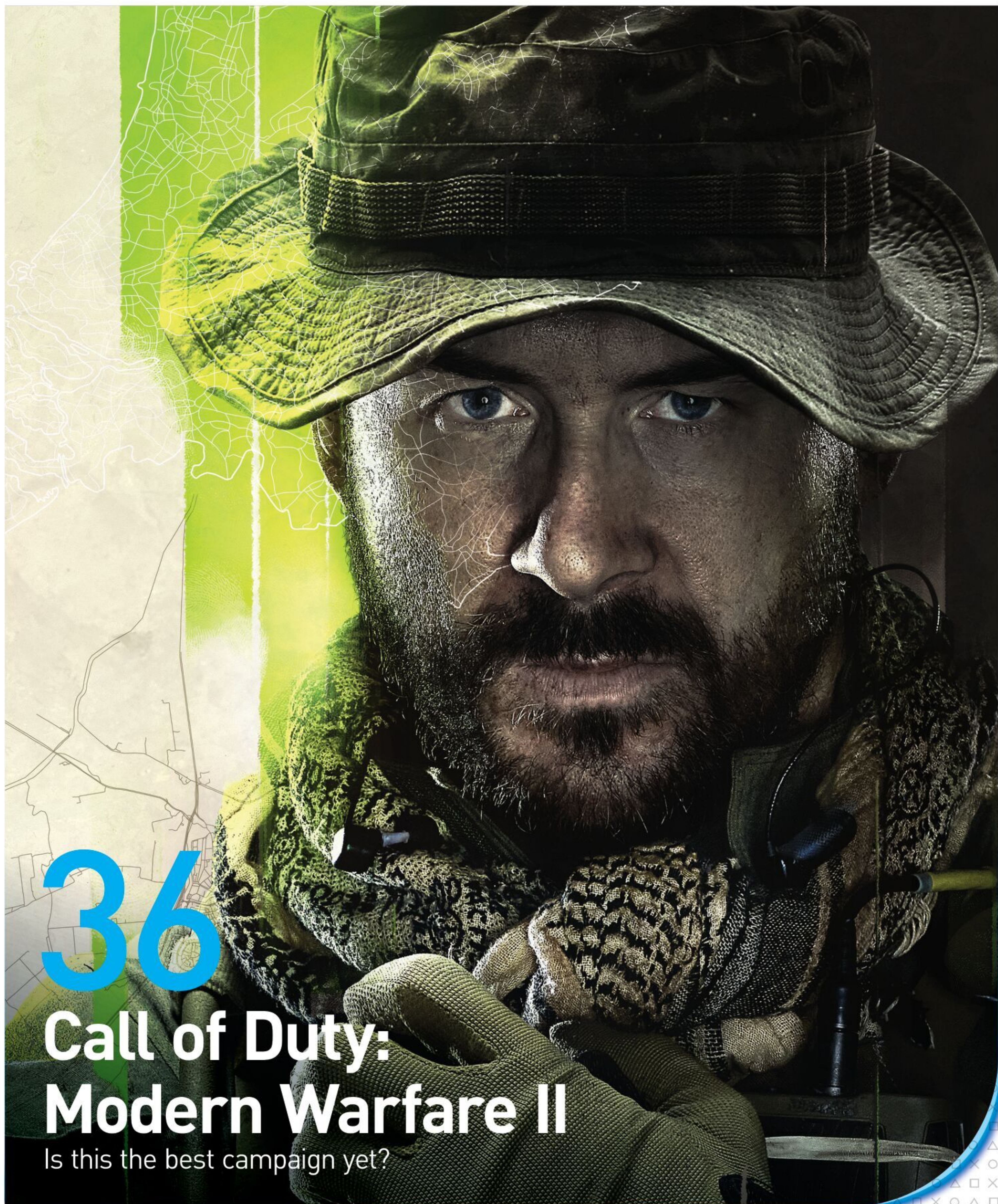
It’s spring, which means the magpies are in full swooping harassment mode. Being the boss, Dan can relate to the hectoring need to pursue prey, hence his affection for the magpie.
PLAYING
Saints Row
FAVE BIRD
Magpie



Kratos
VIDEOGAME CHARACTER

Kratos continues to be a fictional character, so we can only guess what his favourite bird is. But this month we couldn’t be bothered guessing. Probably a bird of prey.
PLAYING
Nothing or everything
FAVE BIRD
Not sure

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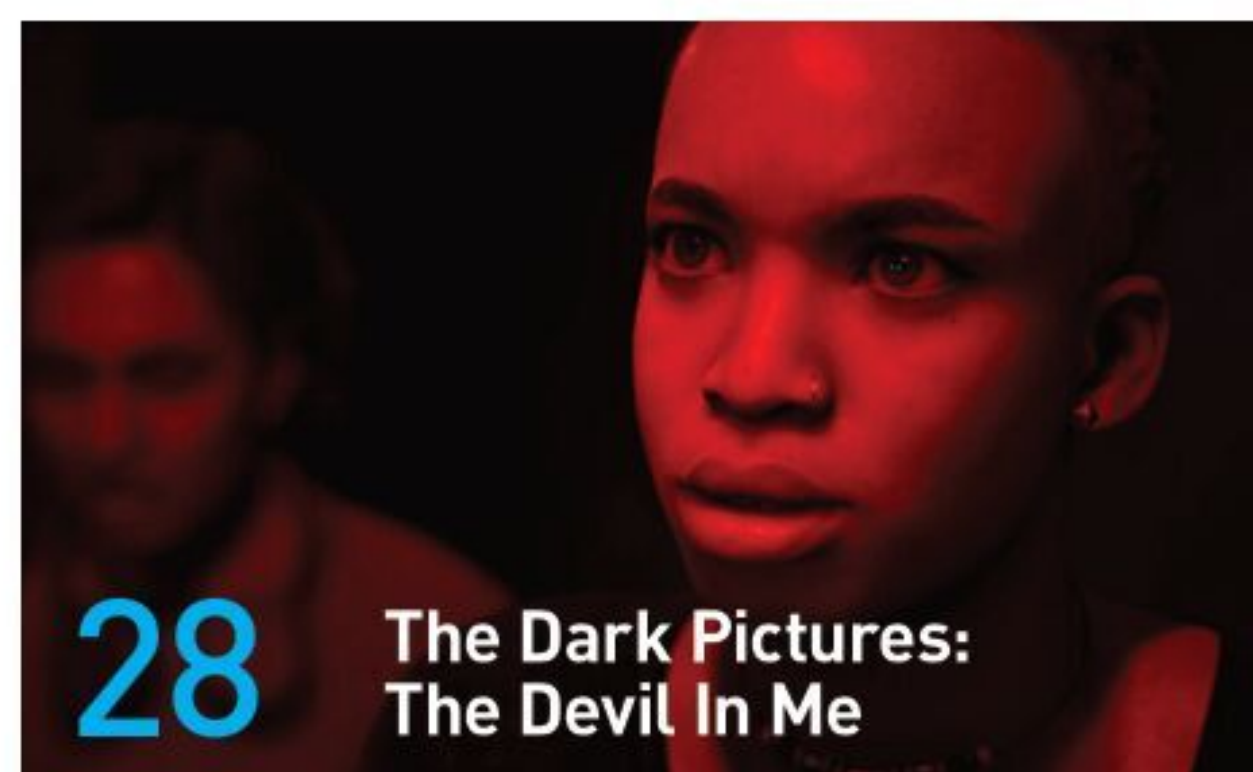
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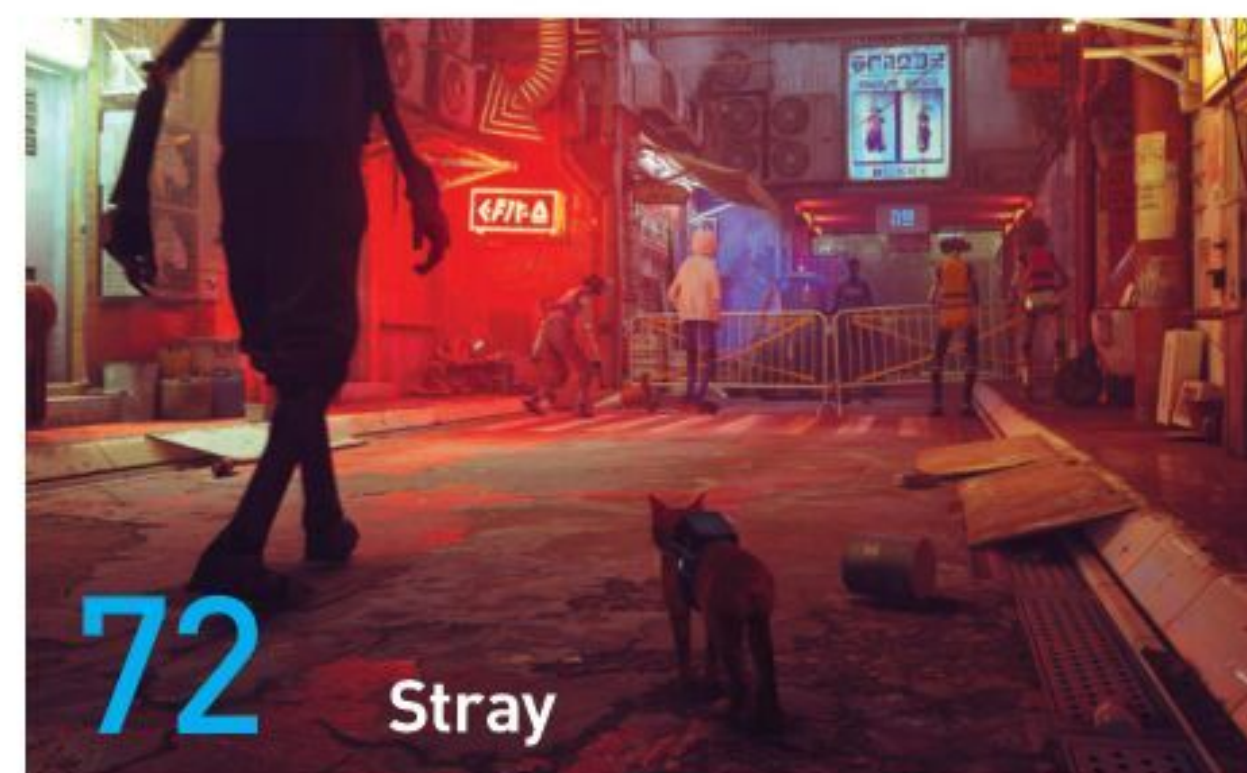
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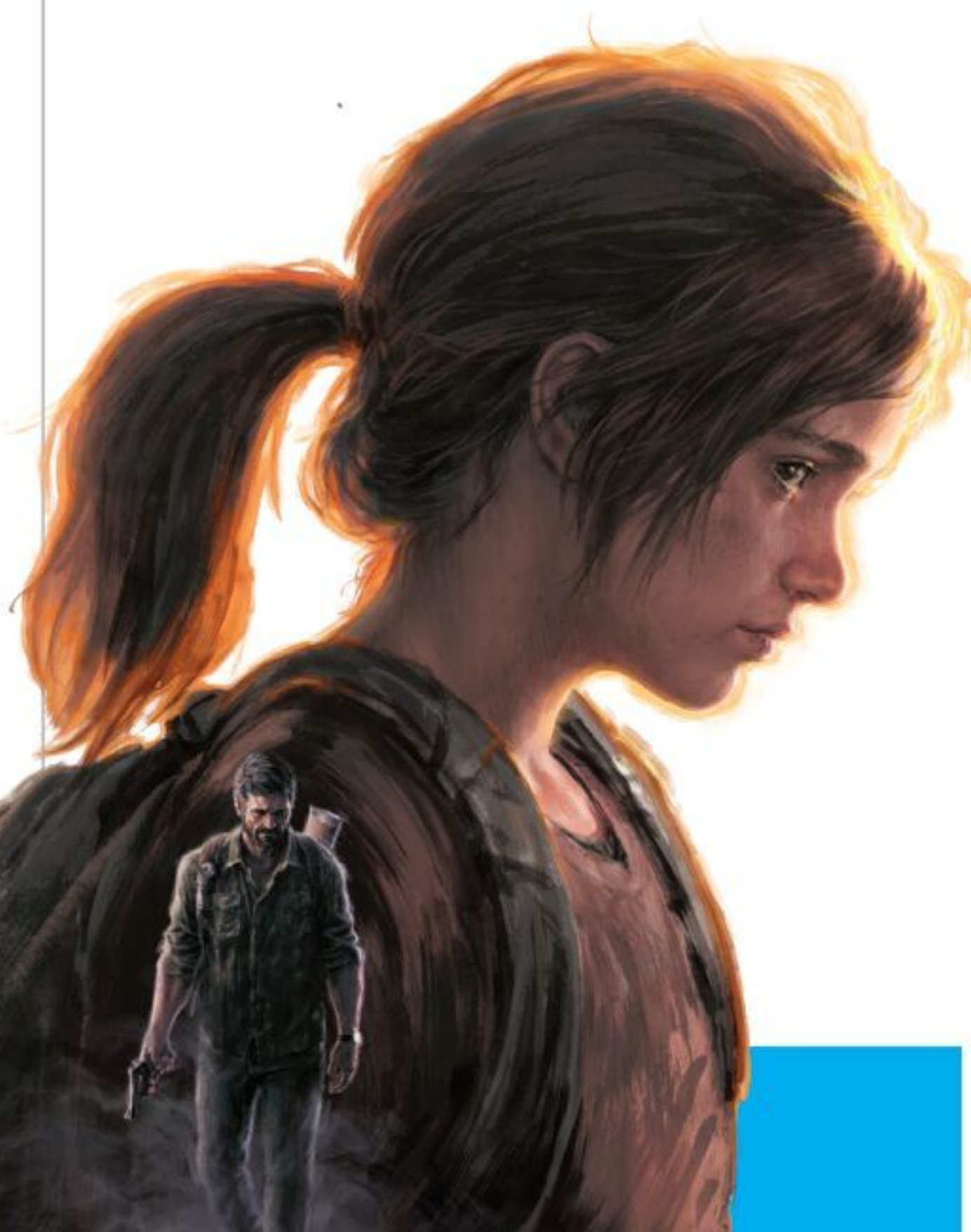
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Insider

Getting you closer to PlayStation's most exciting stories, people, and culture

Although Amicia's more battle-hardened with that crossbow, the developers don't want you getting comfortable with killing.



■ It's really good playing with the DualSense. I'm happy that people will soon play and give us feedback about it! ■

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The DualSense Edge levels up controllers



A Plague Tale goes bigger and better

Requiem's lead level designer Kevin Pinson discusses greater freedom and heaps o' rats

When you think about the creative possibilities raised by the latest and more powerful technology, you probably think of something that's both large in scale and pleasing to the eye. In other words, even larger groups of disgusting, plague-carrying, flesh-eating rats was probably not among the things you pictured – though it does fit the bill.

But once A Plague Tale: Requiem, followup to surprise hit A Plague Tale: Innocence, is released on 18 October on PS5, you'll never be too far from hordes of the rodents, which now swarm in bands of 300,000 rather than the 3,000 managed on PS4 (which we found impressive enough). The rats aren't the only things being boosted, though: the hardware leap has also given developers more ways to work with visuals and mechanics, especially with light.

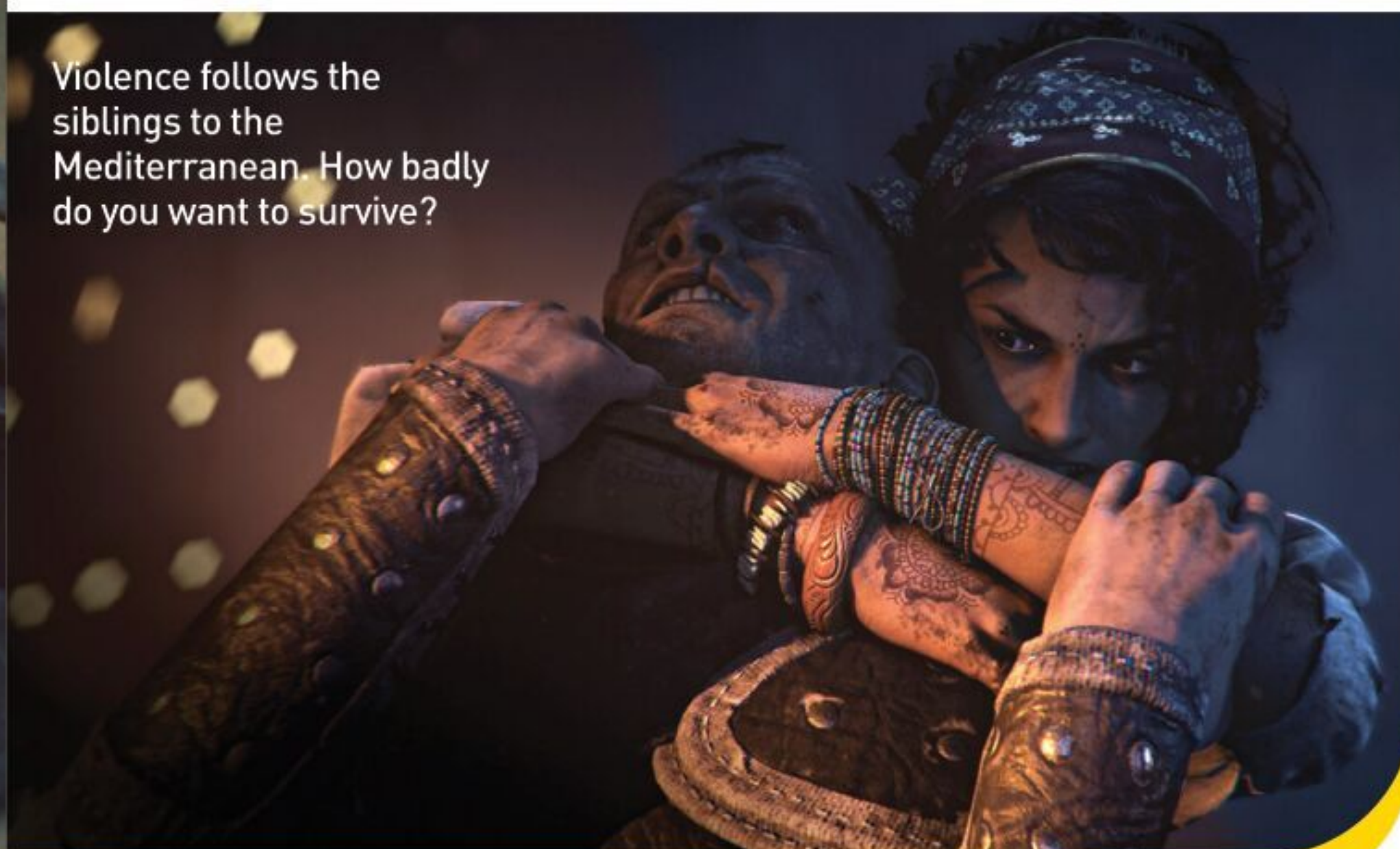
"Specifically, we are a game about light," Asobo Studio's lead level designer Kevin Pinson tells us. "The power of the PS5 allows us to have more lights, [and] do more things with it. It's really expensive from a game engine perspective to use the light as a gameplay mechanic, but this current

gen allows us to use more dynamic lights." Light was, of course, an important mechanic in the previous game, enabling you to keep rats away from Amicia, but that's being expanded with the use of tar. When you throw it at an open flame, that sticky stuff will increase a torch's flaming radius for a time, the broader light allowing you to reach areas you couldn't before.

The process of remastering the original game for PS5 was beneficial to the team, helping them work out early on what unique features they could implement on the console. Naturally the studio is doubling down on using the DualSense's haptics to ensure you really feel that dreadful sensation of being swarmed by rats between your fingers. Pinson adds, "With Requiem it's

■ The DualSense's haptics ensure you feel the sensation of being swarmed by rats. ■

Violence follows the siblings to the Mediterranean. How badly do you want to survive?



also a lot about the soundscapes and the physicality of the environment, so we try to transcribe that into the haptic feedback. It's really good playing with the PS5 DualSense. I'm happy that people will soon play and give us feedback about it!"

WIDENING THE PATH

An increase in size and scale is usual for sequels, and the Plague Tale development team has grown, almost doubling from Innocence's 40 to 70. Growing along with that is a campaign that's estimated to be about 15 to 18



Wider levels are designed to promote player choice and give you a greater sense of freedom. Do you sneak around enemies, pick them off from a distance, or embrace the rats to go full chaos? Deciding how to progress is satisfying.

There is, nonetheless, the sense that Requiem's levels are larger, albeit in width rather than length, which addresses past criticisms. "Innocence was really narrow every step of the way, but although we still keep the narrative drive of everything, we want

Amicia's new tools include the aforementioned tar, but she's also got a nifty crossbow, while you can use knives you find lying around levels to finish off stunned enemies (or you can save them to unlock secret chests that may provide even more helpful materials and resources).

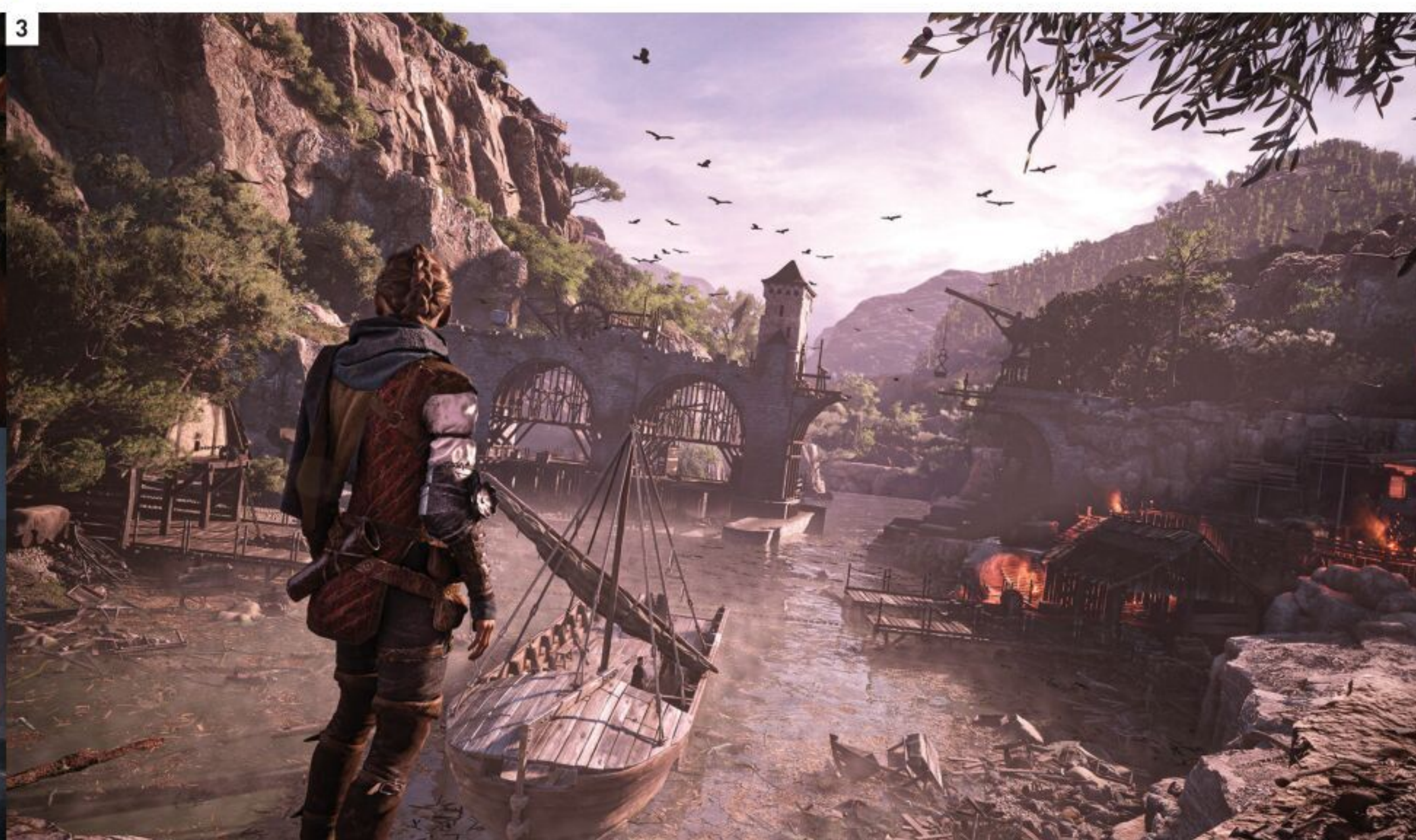
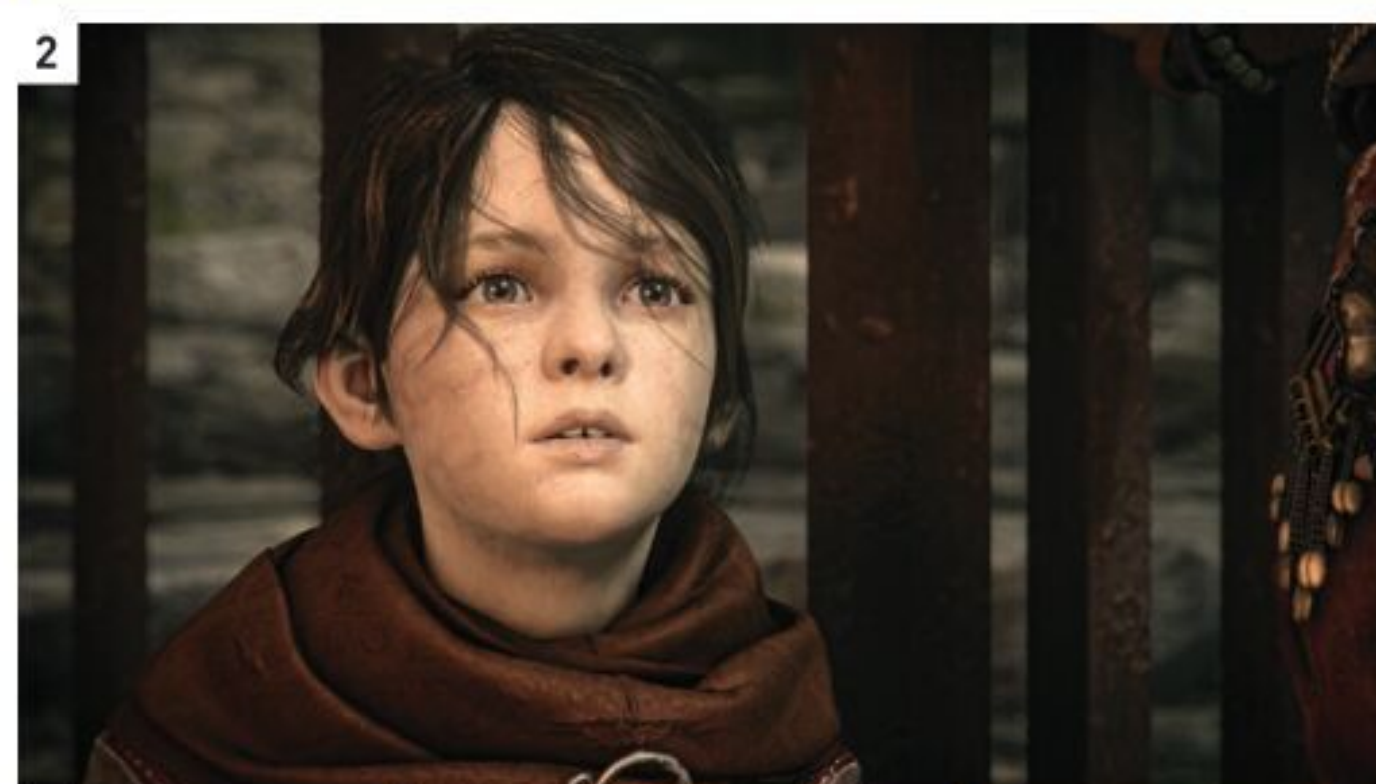
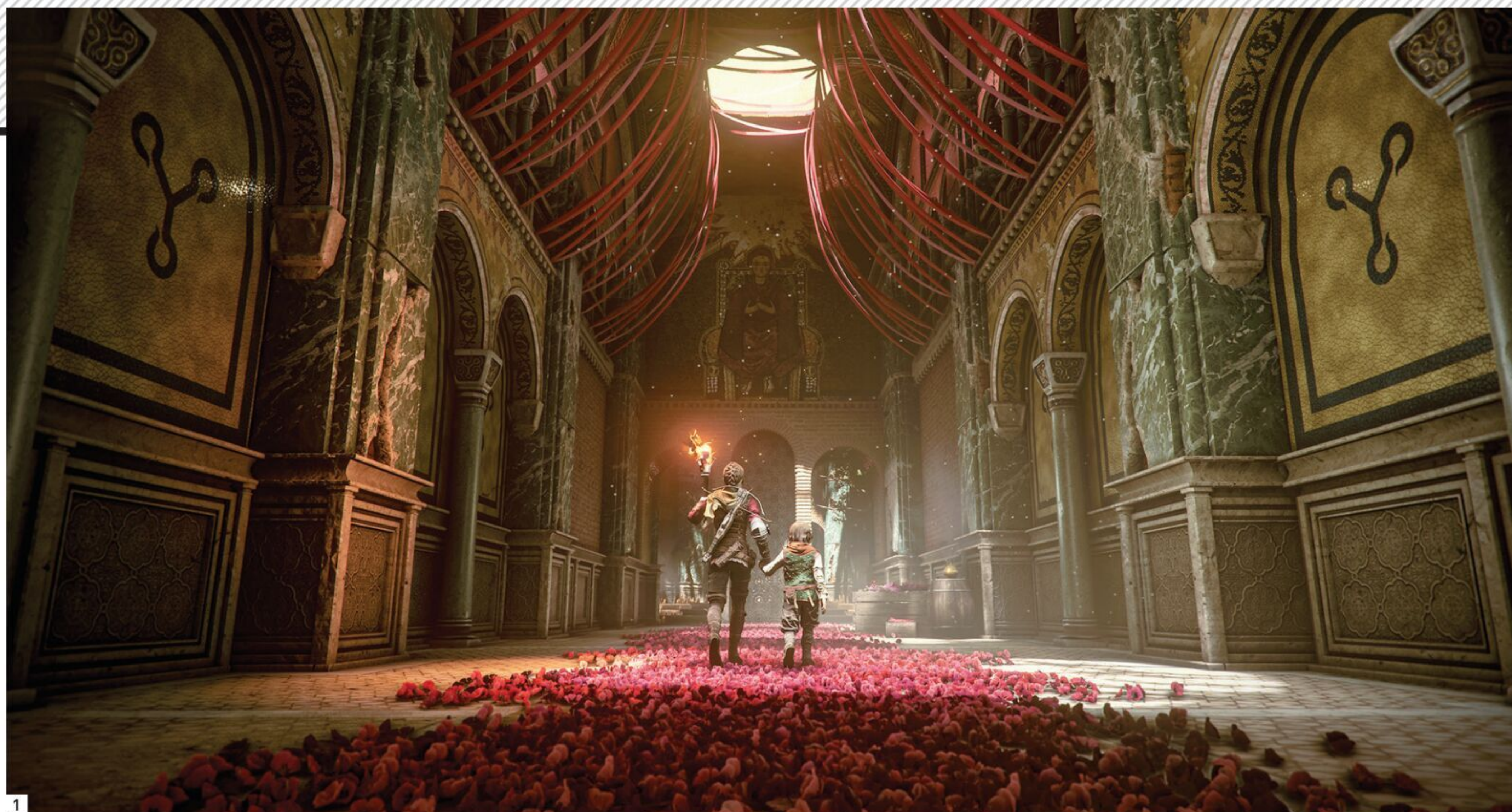
If Innocence drew comparisons with *The Last Of Us*, albeit set in 14th-century France, then *Requiem* may be likened to Part II, with a recent trailer giving the impression that Amicia's more hardened to violence and prepared to kill to ensure her and Hugo's survival. Nonetheless, in-game

"We're not pushing [the violence] too far because this is really about them – it's not about anything else," says Pinson. "It's the right amount for us to tell the story we want to tell, which we hope you will be satisfied with when you put the controller down at the end."

* A Plague Tale: Requiem will swarm over to PS5 on 18 October.

Rats can climb up or drop down to your level, which make it even easier for them to devour nearby soldiers.





1 While they began the first game almost like strangers, the de Rune siblings' bond is much closer in Requiem.

2 Hugo's condition gives him more advanced powers with rats, but using this will take a toll on him. **3** Leaving behind the last console generation, Requiem's world looks more expansive with greater draw distances. **4** You have more combat tools at your disposal this time around, but ultimately stealth and avoiding combat can still be a smart and resourceful option.

5 As well as meeting new characters on their journey, Amicia and Hugo will be travelling with alchemist Lucas from Innocence.



TEKKEN THEIR TIME

The Tekken stage dimmed, and Jin Kazama's infamously cheesy victory cutscene from the first game played. As he was about to grin at the camera, the screen flickered, revealing him in much higher definition. "Get ready". The teaser gives us chills.



Taylor-made news

Stitching the facts together

Our arms are only so long, meaning our embraces are limited. That's not the case for **Embracer Group**, which we already wrote about mere months ago when it acquired **Square Enix's** western development studios.

Yes, Embracer's made even more purchases in recent weeks, making its portfolio even more eclectic. Studios it now owns include:

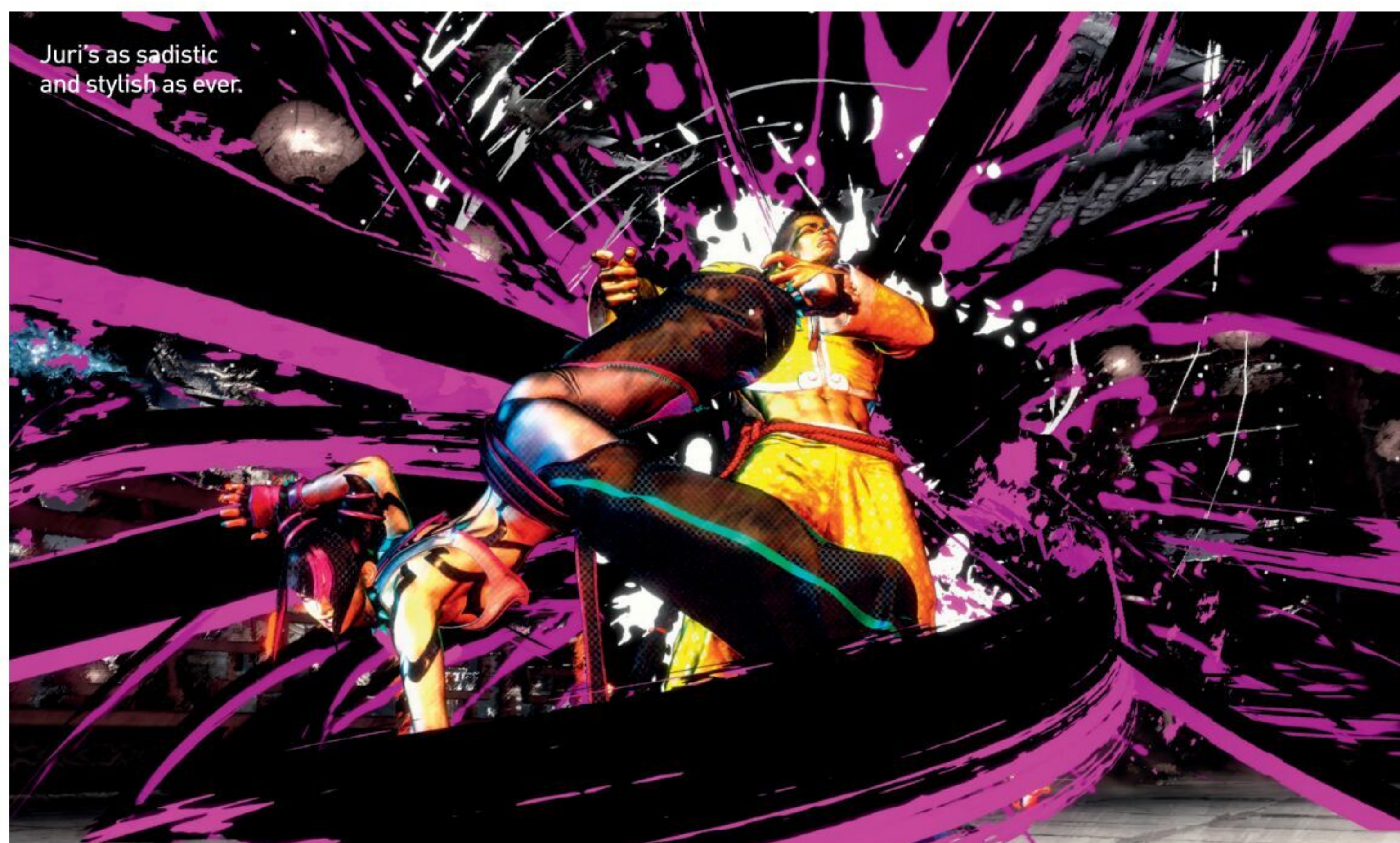
Tripwire Interactive, which makes horde shooter series *Killing Floor*; **Tuxedo Labs**, the developer of PC phenomenon *Teardown*;

Limited Run Games, which, as you'd expect, publishes games physically in limited runs (ones which might not otherwise be released at all in hard form); and vocal processing tech company **Singtrix**.

And that course was only a second breakfast. For eleventimes, Embracer devoured something truly mouthwatering: the IP rights to **The Lord Of The Rings** and **The Hobbit** books. That's a lot of eggs, and a lot of baskets. Let's hope all those devs can flourish.

A fighting chance

Big news about multiple fighting games as the genre is poised for a new era



Last month the first proper Evo since PlayStation took co-ownership went off without a hitch. With plenty of standout moments and exciting commentary, it was a blast to watch. But fighting game fans weren't only enraptured by the head-to-heads, they got to hear some big announcements too. With most of the main-stage games getting a little old, the genre is on the verge of a revamp that could change it entirely.

Street Fighter 6 is the biggest game on the horizon, and was shown off at Evo alongside the best-of-the-best dishing out beatdowns in Street Fighter V. Two characters were announced, the returning Juri displaying as chaotic and dangerous an energy as ever, and newcomer ninja Kimberly bouncing around in a wild and infectious fashion. When she walked onto the stage, she cartwheeled so fast she flipped past the camera before awkwardly running back. It's all part of SF6's abundant personality, the RE Engine visuals looking extremely slick while still conveying plenty of charm. So far there's been a fairly equal balance between new talent and returning fighters, reflecting the time that's passed in-universe.

ROUND TWO

But it feels like you can't have Street Fighter without Tekken. They couldn't be more different, but as two of the biggest series around they often feel locked in competition nonetheless, each pushing the other forwards as good

fighting rivals should. Fans were treated to a teaser (see 'Tekken Their Time', above), but what does it all mean? Are we getting a true Tekken 8 or some kind of reboot, given the references to the very first game?

Perhaps the most surprising news of a comeback was released via Rock Howard's star-embazoned leather jacket in a teaser trailer. It doesn't herald more King Of Fighters, it's SNK's way of announcing that Fatal Fury/Garou will be returning. It's the publisher's latest revival, and an unexpected one at that. Garou: Mark Of The Wolves has long been hailed as a pixel fighter masterpiece, so it'd be great to see the developer take a back-to-basics approach.

That isn't all. Guilty Gear Strive's new fighter, Bridget, was announced and released, as was MultiVersus' first proper season, and rollback for Dragon Ball FighterZ (which doesn't seem to be going anywhere). Fighting games are still a big deal, and it's all the more reason tournaments like Evo remain important.

* Looking forward to a particular punch-up? Let us know: play@futurenet.com

Chapter One purposefully avoids spelling out what binds Holmes and Watson so closely together – Awakened is that story.

Holmes improvement

Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened gets ground-up remake

Frogwares is returning to 2007's *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened*, giving it an overhaul and bringing it to PS5 and PS4. The original game's story will be rewritten (it'll follow a younger Holmes and Watson, for a start) but the setup will remain the same: what if Sherlock Holmes encountered a clutch of Cthulhu cultists?

Continuing the 'young Sherlock' arc established in 2021's *Chapter One*, the

lad's since teamed up with the good doctor, grown some stubble, and is ready to take on some absolute horrors in London. What begins as a missing person case soon spins out into a shocking supernatural conspiracy, including all the soggy twists and turns you'd expect of a Doyle-meets-Lovecraft mashup.

BRINGING IT HOME

A remake of *The Awakened* was not Frogwares' first pick for a new project.

However, as the developer is based primarily in Ukraine, the ongoing Russian invasion has forced the studio to change course on many fronts, even turning to Kickstarter to partially fund the project.

"We've always wanted to remake this game at some point, but the war has forced us into making it now," producer Denys Chebotarov says. "By working on a title that has the bulk of its content, scope and narrative all locked in place after just a few weeks, we are giving ourselves a much more predictable and structured development cycle... exactly what we need right now while the rest of our days remain so uncertain."

★ The Kickstarter was a success. Watson and Holmes will return to the case soon.

■ The lad has teamed up with the good doctor and is ready to take on some absolute horrors in London. ■



PLAY INVESTIGATES

Woah de Cologne

It was great to be back in person at Europe's biggest gaming event, even if there were few surprises

This has been a cold and wet winter, but it's been a good excuse to stay inside and play videogames. In PLAY's case, though, we've been hitting concrete and braving crowds, armed with only a face mask, hand gel, and enthusiasm, as we found ourselves once more in Cologne, Germany for Gamescom. Europe's very own 'heart of gaming' was back and in-person.

Even with the now-traditional Opening Night Live hosted by Geoff Keighley to kick

things off, Gamescom has always had fewer big reveals than the likes of E3. That's largely owing to it taking place later in the summer, although given the absence of E3 this year, with only the modest Play Days (also organised by Keighley) to fill the gap, you might have thought of this as an open goal. Well, if you have an appetite for self-important CG trailers with barely a glimpse of in-game footage for games that probably won't be out for at least another three or four years, then goals were indeed scored.

Still, there was something special about being able to enjoy the hype as part of a crowd rather than just watching a stream on a laptop, although the two-hour showcase had little to truly get pulses racing. When Keighley's wheeling out Hideo Kojima over a prerecorded video to announce not a game but a podcast, and Sony's only official contribution is the reveal of the DualSense Edge controller (see p15), it brings a sense of 'this'll do' to proceedings. Compare it to Kojima's presence at the first Opening Night Live



INSIDER

1 Hall 6 of the Koelnmesse played host to Opening Night Live, followed by a free metal concert two evenings later to promote Metal: Hellsinger. **2** The famous south entrance, ready to receive

game fans as if no time had passed at all. **3** Sonic Frontiers proved popular at Sega's booth, though an oversight with autosaving meant fans were able to discover more secrets in the

demo than intended. Oh Sonic, you *spoil* us... **4** Bandai Namco's booth proved popular with the public – we imagine the enormous Luffy statue played a part in attracting a crowd.



four years ago, and there is a clear sense that right now the industry isn't positioned to make announcements with the same level of impact.

FOR THE GAMERS

But to judge Gamescom on the basis of how many announcements were genuinely new would be to miss the point. It is ultimately a space for celebrating gaming in all its stripes. Over the days following that opening night, show floors entertained with larger-than-life stands and stages

Frontiers. The TikTok booth, meanwhile, successfully hosted stations for both Street Fighter 6 and the free-to-play MultiVersus. And if there was one clear winner at the show, based on the queues for the merchandise stall and the number of cosplayers modelling themselves on it, it was Genshin Impact, the 3.0 update for which coincided with the event (flick to p46 for more on that).

On top of that, for many Gamescom is a festival where they can come together as a community. It attracted about 265,000

Of course, we had a job to do, and that was to seek out the most exciting games coming to PlayStation upon the show floor and in the business halls. We regularly interview developers and get to grips with games over the internet, but Gamescom is a brilliant opportunity to go hands-on again with these games and see other people's reactions to them, as well as grill the developers in person.

With developers coming from countries as varied as New Zealand (in the case of Flintlock developer Aurora 44) and South Korea (Neowiz, with its awards-sweeping soulsborne take on Pinocchio, Lies Of P), Gamescom was very much a global event. Of course, it was also not without notable absences, with Japanese publishers like Square Enix and Capcom saving their major hands for Tokyo Game Show, which will have taken place by the time this issues is in your hands. Yet, despite our exhaustion after an intense few days up and down the Koelnmesse, it really is good to be back at big gaming events like Gamescom, and long may they continue.

■ To judge it on the basis of how many announcements were genuinely new would be to miss the point. ■

hosting competitions and giveaways, including a free concert to celebrate metal rhythm FPS Metal: Hellsinger. Some publishers, meanwhile, were happy to use the event as a launch party for their newest releases, which is why there were as many people queueing to play Saints Row as an upcoming release like Sonic

visitors across the week – attendance was down by more than 100,000 on the last in-person show in 2019, though it's understandable why some people opted to play things safe and stay at home. Not everyone had the option we had, of ducking into the business halls to quiet down with a bottle of sparkling water.

*** Gamescom will return on 23-27 August 2023. Fingers crossed that Sony will too.**



CITY OF ANGELS

From ritzy Beverly Hills to bohemian Venice Beach, Dead Island 2 is promising to take you on a high-octane tour across the “most iconic locations” in LA (which is not, you might observe, actually an island). Remember to send us a postcard!

PlayStation voices

The month in mouthing off

"TODAY I AM HERE TO SHARE SOME OTHER NEWS!" HIDEO KOJIMA INTERRUPTS GAMESCOM TO LAUNCH HIS NEW PODCAST.



"THIS NEVEL DONKMANN GUY SENT ME A CODE FOR WHAT HE CALLED 'A FEEL GOOD ROMP IF EVER THERE WAS ONE.'" GOD OF WAR DIRECTOR CORY BARLOG JUMPS INTO THE LAST OF US PART I (SEE OUR THOUGHTS ON P74).



"WE'RE NOT MAKING A SEQUEL, BUT IF WE DID, AI-GENERATED ART WOULD BE SUCH A FUNNY PREMISE FOR THE VILLAIN." THE CHICORY DEVELOPER TAKES A STAND.

Welcome to Hell-A

Zombie slaying RPG Dead Island 2 comes back from the dead next year



After its reveal via a pre-rendered teaser trailer at E3 2014 and almost a decade of silence since, you would be forgiven for thinking that this sequel was all but dead in the water. In a surprise rereveal at Gamescom, however, we finally got a glimpse of an all-new animated trailer and a slice of gory gameplay from this long-awaited zombie slaying adventure.

Yager (creator of Spec Ops: The Line) was the original developer, but the series now seems to have landed in the capable hands of Deep Silver Dambuster Studios – publisher Deep Silver's own developer. Although its previous major project, Homefront: The Revolution, was met with middling reviews, the energetic action and vibrant visuals of Dead Island 2 suggests it has all the makings of a solid sequel.

HACK-'N'-SLASH

Perhaps the most drastic departure from the series' roots is the change of setting. While the first entry focused entirely on the fictional tropical island of Banoi, in 2 the action's taking place in the very real city of Los Angeles. Nicknamed 'Hell-A', this nightmarish vision of LA sees the colourful streets overrun by a horde of the undead.

Isolated from the outside world by a strict quarantine, you play as six selectable protagonists each inexplicably immune to the epidemic and trying to escape the chaos. Despite a far more humorous tone than its forbear, Dead Island 2 doesn't pull any punches when it comes to violence. Boasting the "most advanced dismemberment system" in a game to date, it's easy to spot several severed limbs, countless splatters of blood, and even the odd beheading in just a few short minutes of quick-cut in-game footage.

While there is clearly a renewed focus on melee combat, and the added brutality promises to make things feel even meatier than before, there will also be a selection of unique firearms to discover. You won't have to face things on your own either, as the campaign will be playable both singly and in co-op with up to three friends.

* Dead Island 2 will (fingers crossed) be released on 3 February 2023.

With dark face buttons and a striking patterned touchpad, the DualSense Edge stands out from the crowd.



Edge of our seats

Sony unveils a premium DualSense controller

Rumours have been swirling for months regarding the development of a premium PlayStation controller. Other consoles have premium pads, and with the arrival of the pricy third-party Reflex line from Scuf it seemed almost inevitable that the announcement of an official high-end alternative to the DualSense was on the way. Now Sony has lifted the curtain on the DualSense Edge – an advanced

alternative to the PlayStation pad packed with high-end features.

Customisation is clearly the focus. You can remap or deactivate buttons on the fly thanks to a new dedicated function button and save your desired configuration to preset profiles. Adaptive triggers are included as on the DualSense, but you can now tweak the individual trigger travel distance. This is excellent news for avid FPS fans or aspiring esports pros trying to trim down their reaction times.

■ You can remap or deactivate buttons on the fly, and tweak the adaptive triggers' individual travel distance. ■

With three swappable stick caps (described as “standard, high dome, and low dome”) and two types of optional back bumper, there are plentiful control options here. While the DualSense Edge doesn't have any features that we haven't already seen offered by other high-end controllers, the ability to replace worn-out joystick modules should give it the *ahem* edge when it comes to longevity.

A controller carrying case and braided Type-C cable are included, and while the retail price has yet to be announced we wouldn't be too surprised if it fell somewhere between \$200 and \$300 given the features on offer.

*** What features do you expect from a premium pad? Tell us @PLAYgamingmag**

Detective noir

Alone In The Dark makes a haunting return

What made the original games work was how unsettling they were, and the new one looks like being every bit as unnerving – you constantly come up against some absolutely bizarre happenings in an otherwise everyday home. Playing as either Edward Carnby or Emily Hartwood, you fend off all manner of tentacled monstrosities while discussing the mystery with the manor's strange residents, who seem oddly calm despite all the 1920s southern gothic horror. With the kind of spooky dark corners that work well on PS5 (it's new-gen only), and a psychological horror story from the writer behind the rather excellent SOMA and Amnesia, Alone In The Dark promises to be a delightfully chilling return to form for a series that's always deserved more love than it got.



Numbers Game

We do the maths

155

Minutes – the length of Tekken: Bloodline, Netflix's new animated adaptation of Tekken 3's story.

4,499

Pennies to pay for one of Insert Coin's Persona 25th anniversary hoodies, each celebrating one of the games.

04

Plush pins and many more goodies besides, in the upcoming Five Nights At Freddy's: Security Breach collector's edition.

484

Pages in Deadly Premonition creator Swery65's novel, Dear Ambivalence: The Mustachioed One, The Witches, And The Suspended Body.

20,000,000

Players and rising in MultiVersus. Free is good, as is the fighting on show in this crossover brawler.

100

Millimetres, the height of the Nendoroid figure of Undyne from Undertale. Don't let her down.

THE FUTURE OF MAGAZINES



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Previews



"HOLD BACK
THE GROWING
DINO HORDE."

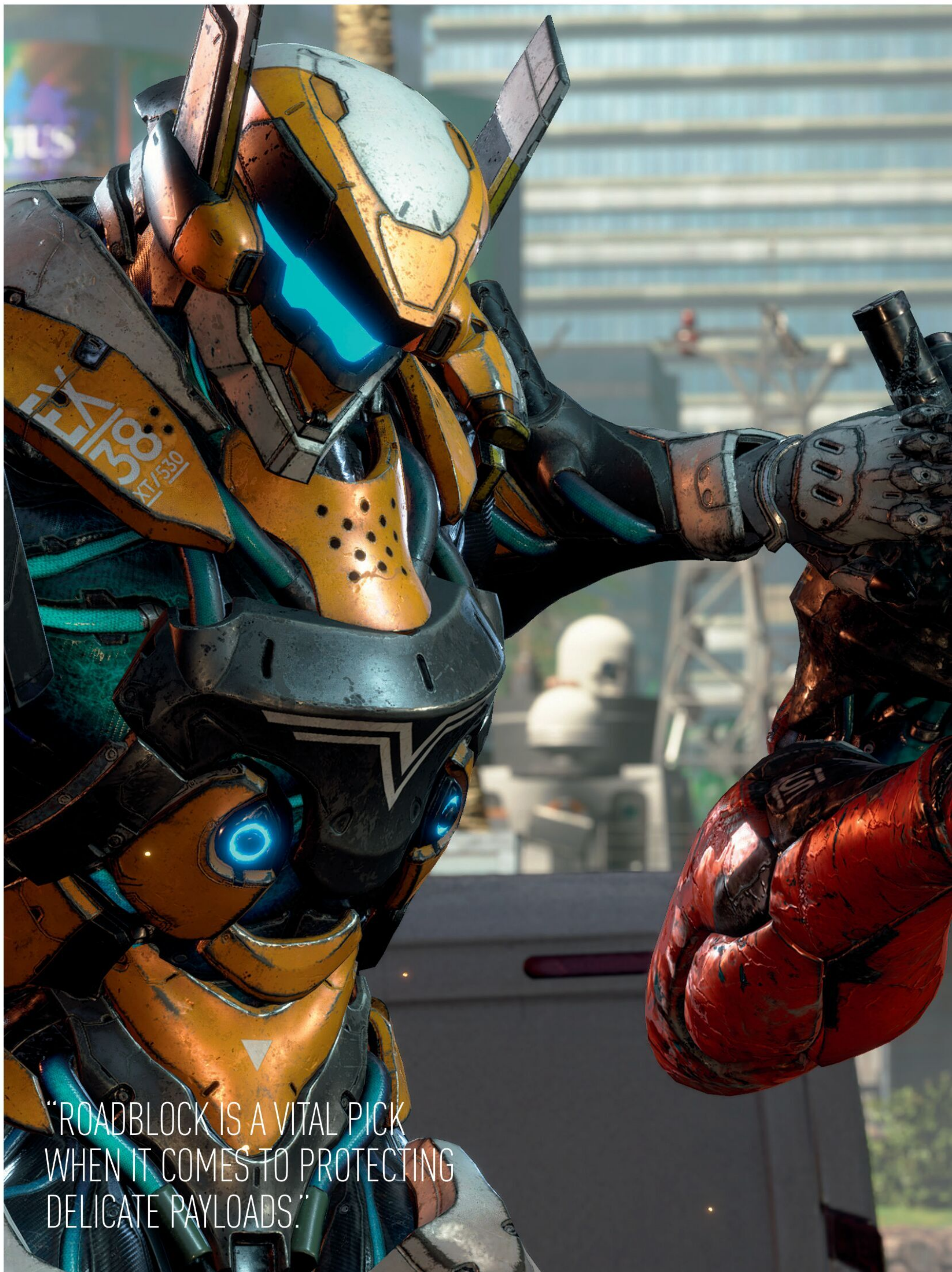
20 Exoprimal

28 The Dark Pictures: The Devil In Me

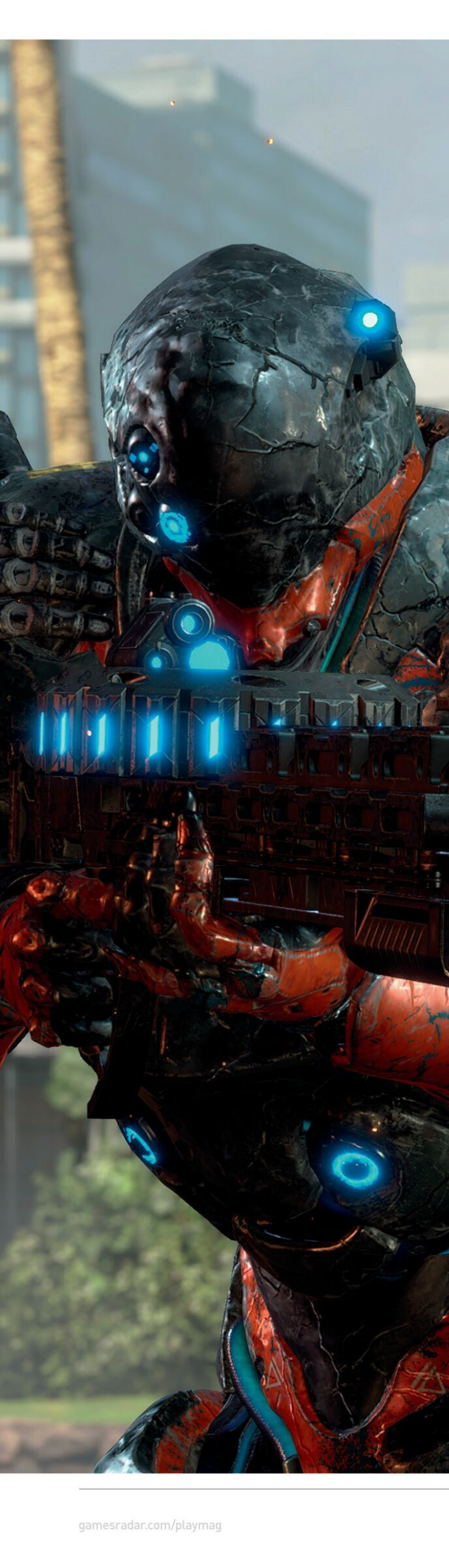
Book yourself into this Scare BnB

HIGHLIGHTS

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"ROADBLOCK IS A VITAL PICK
WHEN IT COMES TO PROTECTING
DELICATE PAYLOADS."



Gear up and grab your friends – Exoprimal pits two competing teams of five human players against an army of dinosaurs.

PREVIEW

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / ETA 2023 / PUB CAPCOM
DEV CAPCOM / PLAYERS 1-10

Exoprimal

Raptor round your finger

The year is 2040 and the cities of Earth are under attack. The enemy? An endless stream of deadly dinosaurs pouring out of portals in the sky. Exoprimal may not be quite the tense successor to Dino Crisis that many people had been hoping for, but from our latest hands-on it's clear there are still barrels of fun to be had in this upcoming Jurassic shooter.

Dropped into an abandoned strip of a sprawling science-fiction city, it's hard to overstate the sense of chaos that shapes many of your attempts to hold back the growing dinosaur horde. It's easy to find yourself lost in a snarling sea of lethal teeth as hundreds of raptors pour into the area like a ravenous river, and the periodic boss encounters should be more than enough to keep even the most confident dinosaur slayer on their toes.

SUIT-'EM-UP

Armed with a selection of cutting-edge mechs, called exosuits, it's up to teams of five to take on these prehistoric pests and complete timed objectives at the behest of Leviathan – an evil research AI that's trying to collect combat data on the dinosaur menace.

Surprisingly, the design of this horde shooter owes more to the likes of Rainbow Six or Apex Legends than Back 4 Blood or World War Z. The exosuits

may be grouped into three rather conventional categories (assault, tank, and support), but jumping into any one of the available models offers the kind of distinct playstyle that you'd expect of characters in a hero shooter.

The blade-wielding Zephyr, for example, transforms the shooter action into something more akin to a hack-'n'-slash. Easily the most agile of the bunch, this suit is best used to dart across the battlefield and take down high-priority targets in a matter of seconds, but its reliance on melee capabilities makes you particularly vulnerable to the swipes

FACTRICK

1. LIVELY LIZARDS

You'd better put on your running shoes: vicious velociraptors can reach almost 25 miles an hour.

2. CLEVER GIRL

Exoprimal isn't gunning for accuracy with its dino designs – real-life raptors had feathers.

3. A DINO CRISIS

Capcom's last dinosaur shooter, Dino Crisis 3, was released back in 2003, but the series remains beloved.

of hard-to-reach airborne enemies. We end up spending the most time with the newcomer-friendly Roadblock – rather than dealing offensive damage, it's sturdy enough to keep us and our nimbler teammates alive (which is just how we do things at PLAY Towers). Armed with a practically impenetrable shield and a comfortably gigantic health pool, Roadblock is a vital pick when it comes to protecting delicate payloads or locking

down chokepoints.

It's admittedly a shame that none of the suits we've seen so far have showcased any mechanics that we haven't previously seen in other hero shooters. It's easy to draw parallels between the grenade-lobbing Barrage and Overwatch's Junkrat, for instance. That said, there's a number of currently unrevealed exosuits so this could all change by launch.

TRACK RECORD

Creator of the blockbuster beast-slaying series Monster Hunter and Devil May Cry, Capcom has a solid pedigree when it comes to pitting players against impossibly powerful creatures.



» One thing that already sets Exoprimal apart is the ability to switch out your chosen mech on the fly. Not only does this feature help maintain our momentum during longer assaults, being able to adapt to powerful bosses as they appear removes much of the frustration that otherwise arises from trying to complete PvE encounters with poorly organised teams of randoms.

There are a few moments when the frantic, dinosaur-filled nature of firefights does make it too difficult to keep track of team composition, leading to a fair few deaths when we end up in a group without any dedicated healers. If you're planning to play with a regular team of friends with a good balance of roles this shouldn't be an issue, but implementing a matchmaking system similar to Overwatch's role queue could help curb the confusion.

PVEVPV... E?

But the encounters with waves of dinosaurs are only half the action. The flagship Dinosaur Survival mode also has a PvP element. While your team are making their way through the objectives they've been set, a rival team are racing against the clock to complete them sooner. Taking place across parallel

timelines, you're often unable to see the enemy team directly, instead relying on vague hints from Leviathan to keep track of their progress.

With an enemy team on the cards, invasion mechanics can come into play at any point. Good PvE performance is often rewarded with the cathartic opportunity to drop into the enemy timeline to wreak havoc as a powerful dino, each type with its own devastating attacks and special abilities to master. At its best, we're reminded of the fun we had in Destiny 2's Gambit mode.

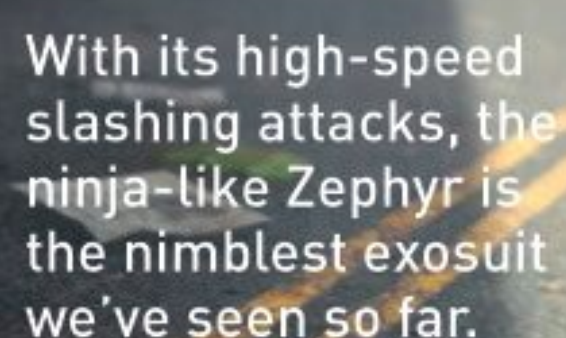
Certain objectives force a more direct form of PvP confrontation, such as the recurring payload race that seems to dominate the latter half of most matches, and it's in such moments that Exoprimal's bombastic action begins to falter. Suits seem balanced for PvE above all else, and without waves of raptors snapping at your heels you're left with nothing to do but chip away at painfully large enemy health bars.

IMPRESSIONS

With great class mechanics and excellent horde gameplay, Exoprimal still has huge potential for silly co-op fun – even if the lacklustre diversions into PvP are lacking the same vicious bite.



1 With no dedicated healer, this squad isn't likely to last long... Healing is a surefire way to earn favours. **2** Funky-looking genetically modified 'neosaurs' bolster enemy ranks. You won't find these in a museum. **3** Need a different set of skills? You can make a quick suit switch at the click of a button to react to a bad situation. **4** Leviathan is your (totally not evil) AI companion throughout missions. Look at those kind eyes.



PLAY | 023

FORMAT PS4 / ETA TBC / PUB NOVECT / DEV NOVECT / PLAYERS 1

Project Code Name M

Why should killers be the only ones committing murder?

Visual novels from new studios don't often have a big impact, but *The House In Fata Morgana* did (it's yet to be released on PlayStation in Europe, though was released on Vita in Japan, and Vita and PS4 in the US). It put Japanese indie developer Novect on the map, and is now regarded as a genre-defining work, one that played with European history and fantasy. So how does Novect follow that up?

It doesn't. Sitting down with *Project Code Name M* (a working title), it's clear this game is a bold departure.

FACTRICK

1. HOLY LAND

Asakusa is home to the Asakusa Senso-ji, the oldest Buddhist temple in all of Tokyo. It's seen in the game!

2. DEATH GAME

As well as *Ace Attorney*, director Hanada Keika names *Danganronpa* as an inspiration.

3. NEW TRICKS

The game's theme song is by Yusuke Tsutumi, a director and musician who has also worked in TV and movies.

The team at Novect are avoiding direct comparisons between the games by transplanting the action to modern-day Tokyo, in particular the Asakusa and Yoshiwara districts familiar to director Hanada Keika. And rather than being another visual novel, this is a graphic murder mystery, taking inspiration from heavy hitters in the genre like *AI: The Somnium Files* and *Ace Attorney*. Yet even with these acknowledged inspirations, this is far from genre-standard.

For one thing, you aren't just solving murders, you're also committing them. You take on the role of both killer and detective in carrying out and solving serial murders, with both perspectives crucial to uncovering

the truth behind crimes taking place across Tokyo. You attempt to commit the perfect locked-room murder one moment (going so far as to perhaps fake a suicide note), and investigate the crime scene the next as a worker for a corpse disposal business.

DIAL M

The latter role is the focus in our hands-on, as our time's split between poking around a murder scene and exploring the streets of Tokyo. Needless to say there's the chance to pass through all sorts of seedy areas as we brush against the world of criminals and yakuza. The crime scene itself is far from a pretty sight. Inside a remote garage are the lifeless bodies of three men, all murdered by an unknown assailant in a brief intro sequence (in which we, playing as the killer, inflict the final blow). A large pool of blood has formed around the corpses, and a mysterious drug called 'M' is scattered around the scene. The MO appears to mirror that of a criminal who disappeared one year ago.

From there, we follow a young woman named Marianne. The influence of *Ace Attorney* is obvious, as we look around for points of interest and people who

may trigger investigation events or clues to help us advance. Rather than working through it all in a single afternoon, though, we can switch between times of day, who's around and what secrets some areas might have on offer changing as we do. The Tokyo cityscape is beautifully rendered and gives a real sense of the vibrant nightlife, red-light district Asakusa standing out in particular. Knowing when to scour for clues, whether that be sunset, daytime, or *ahem* the *dead* of night, gives us the sense that we're peeling back layers of the city to snoop around.

This side of the game still involves a lot of reading, but taking it at our own pace helps us feel in charge. Our demo only covers a small slice of *Project Code Name M*, giving us a scattered glimpse of a complicated mystery we don't feel close to solving. With the story's entire second half still shrouded in mystery, we're intrigued to see how both parts play off one another, especially given the game's much less traditional aspects (even so, it's already shaping up to be much better handled than, say, *Fahrenheit*). But we're confident the conceit will provide plenty of twists and turns, this proof-of-concept being more than slick enough to make us want to see more. Novect is proving itself to be a studio capable of creating intrigue and

surprise through its top-notch storytelling, and raising the level of interaction (as basic as the demo we're playing is) seems like the

perfect way to evolve that.

If Novect successfully pulls off this ambitious blend of genres in the seedy underbelly of Tokyo, this will be something truly special – and the studio could follow up one hit with another.

IMPRESSIONS

While still in its early stages, Project Code Name M already looks like being a must-buy title for fans of adventure games, borrowing ideas from genre favourites yet being distinctive and fresh.



4 What does she know? Turn up the charm and you can get information out of Tokyo's eclectic population. We worry she might be in danger. 5 Is it a frightening murder tableau or a very extra A-level art final? 6 Look at this mess. Perhaps a fight erupted as they fought over the ketchup.

TRACK RECORD Novect previously developed well-received visual novel *The House In Fata Morgana*, plus *Seventh Lair* (which featured some characters from *Fata Morgana*). This is the first time the studio has branched away from visual novels.

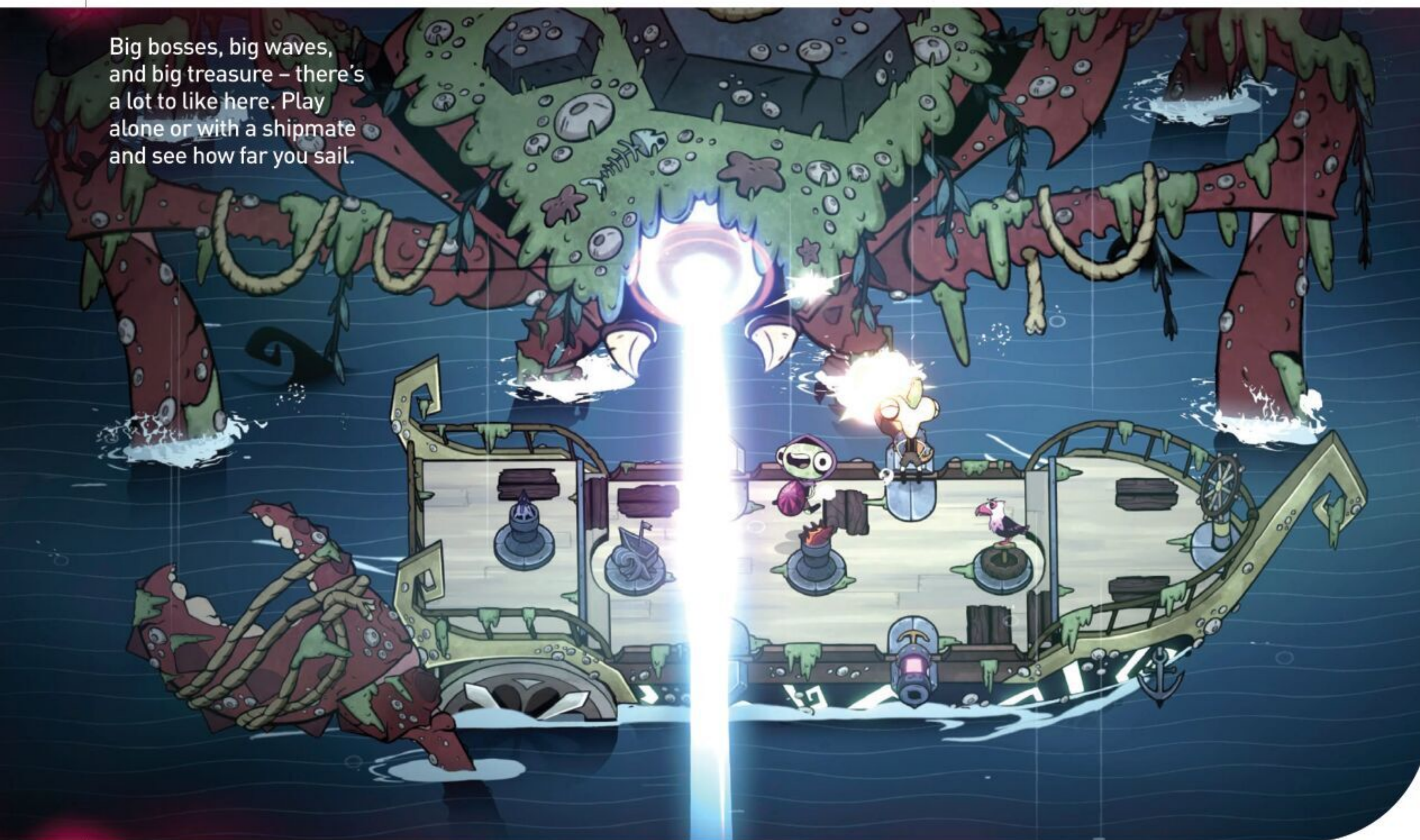


- 1 Sometimes you have a lot to get off your chest. Don't worry if you don't understand Japanese – the game will be translated eventually.
- 2 Exploring at night is necessary for some encounters.
- 3 Corpse disposal is a messy job, but someone's gotta do it!



PREVIEW

Big bosses, big waves, and big treasure – there's a lot to like here. Play alone or with a shipmate and see how far you sail.



FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 22 NOV / **PUB** TEAM 17 / **DEV** FIKA PRODUCTIONS / **PLAYERS** 1-2

Ship Of Fools

Water you gonna do this time?

Tarot readers have a surprisingly positive interpretation of the Fool. When this card crops up in a spread, the Fool can represent a willingness to give over to the process and trust it will all come out okay in the end. That's probably not the sentiment you want steering your ship through choppy waters but a little bit of optimism goes a long way – that is, up until the sea monsters pull your fragile vessel under the waves. Ah well, we should probably give the deck one more shuffle...

In this roguelite, the titular buffoons – there are a number to choose from, each with an heirloom artefact giving them a unique special ability – are the only ones naïve enough to try to save their archipelago. The Great Lighthouse once protected the Fools' home but with its light extinguished, a troubling wind blows in. The Fools take to a ship known as the Stormstrider to cut through the waves and blast away whatever other nastiness, from flying fish to mechanical crabs, is getting carried in on the rough tide. Playable either solo or with a friend in online or couch co-op, few voyages are smooth sailing.

BOUTS ON BOATS

At sea you can alternate between manning the cannons and plugging up the leaky bits of your ship. After all, they don't call this oncoming calamity the Aquapocalypse for nothing!

In between scraping off remnants of oversized squid from your hull, you'll survey the seas and reconsider your course as the storm shifts all around you. There

are islands to visit, resources to scrounge (sand dollars and shards can be used to boost your character or your craft), and definitely some NPCs to

pester. But besides these pockets of calm, there are no clear skies ahead and the storm can even manoeuvre to block your watery path. It's up to you to decide whether it's best to play it safe and sail the long way around or venture into troubled

waters for something shiny that might help you in the long run.

IMPRESSIONS

We're not sure our friendships will be ship-shape after a few runs in this game but we're willing to trust the process!



There's plenty to do on dry land, such as scrounge resources and pester NPCs.

ON THE HORIZON

The next six months, mapped out

02
months



SKULL AND BONES

Can't get enough of hunting for booty? Climb aboard this pirate game, finally ready to set sail.

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 8 NOV
PUB UBISOFT

04
months



DELIVER US MARS

Head to the red planet to save humanity. A cinematic adventure with puzzles and even rock climbing.

FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA 2 FEB / **PUB** FRONTIER
FOUNDRY

06
months



RESIDENT EVIL 4

Leon S. Kennedy's mission to rescue the US president's daughter from a cult is being resurrected.

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 24 MAR
PUB CAPCOM



FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** LATE 2022 / **PUB** AUROGON SHANGHAI / **DEV** AUROGON SHANGHAI / **PLAYERS** 1

Afterimage

Who cares about imminent danger when it looks so pretty?

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they say, but it's a saying this metroidvania is taking literally – in our our time with the opening we experience gorgeous visuals and encroaching danger in equal measure. The genre's so popular with indie developers it can be hard for new games to stand out; we're testing Afterimage at BitSummit, Tokyo's indie event, which is crammed with them. Yet Afterimage has a melancholy vibe that leaves us itching to explore further.

A product of China's growing indie scene, Afterimage opens with the amnesiac Renee awakening in a forest in the world of Engardin. The anime-inspired 2D hand-drawn world invites exploration, but dangers and enemies lurk around every corner. Learning how to overcome these obstacles feels like a reward in itself, and it's a pleasure to master movement, such as bouncing off mushrooms, to move deftly through the world.

IMAGE TRAINING

Plenty of the forest's nasties require a good thumping, and the combat is far from a chore. The fluid, acrobatic attacks allow you to slice, pirouette, and dash around levels like a graceful feather (if feathers had razor-

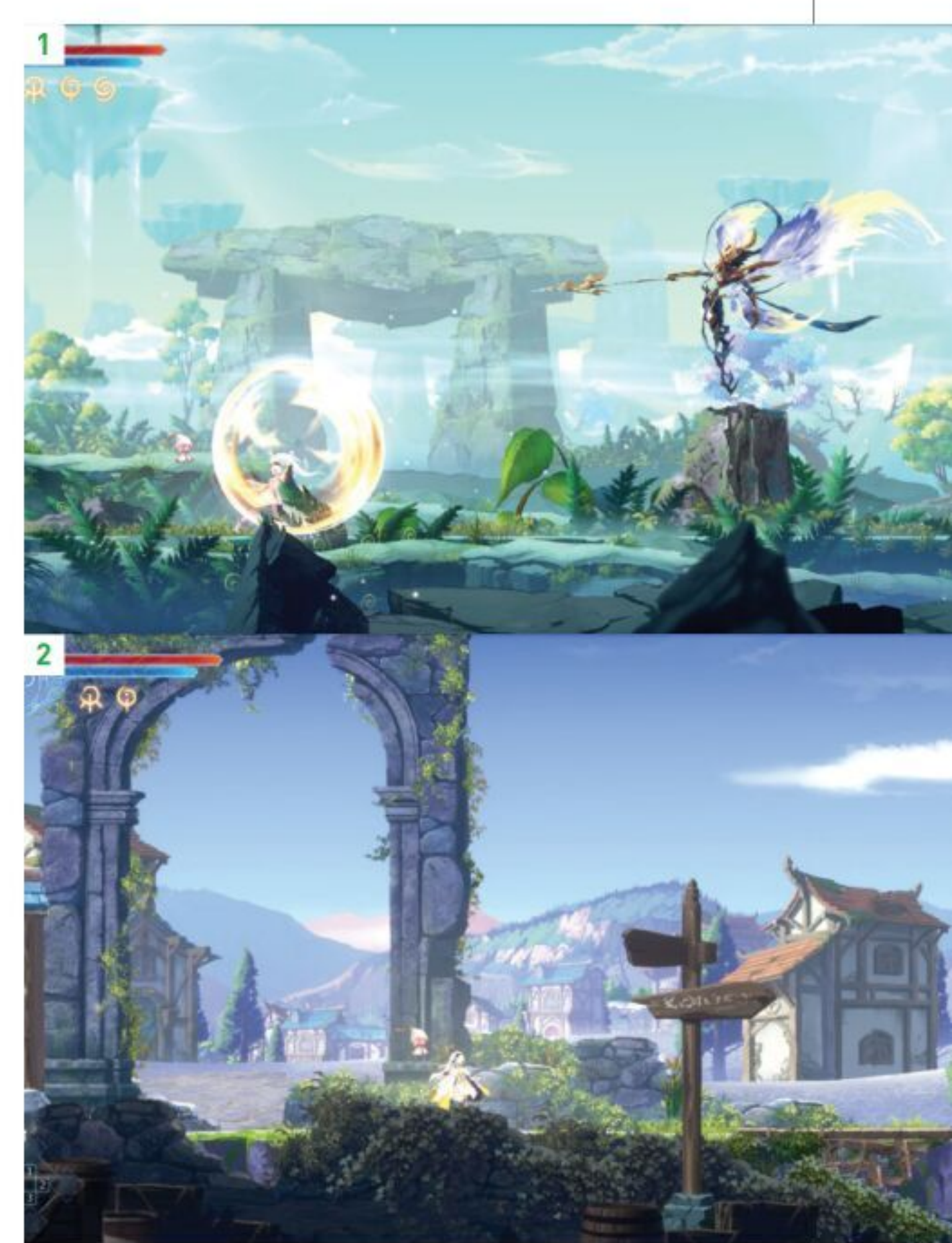
sharp edges). Aerial and ground moves combine with surprising versatility, and we're able to keep our combos going all across the beautiful screens. Additional abilities and boosted stats – dropped by bosses, found hidden around, or simply bought in the skill tree – tease plenty of character development.

Even though our time in Engardin is limited to that opening forest, it feels lavish, with light flowing through trees and an orchestral score, and we're left eager to go beyond the woods. The full game


promises to be a beefy adventure with many more areas, bosses, abilities, side-quests, and the like. It's an ambitious project from an unproven developer, but the potential shown makes us eager to play on.

IMPRESSIONS

Afterimage's opening level shows a lot of promise. Time will tell if it can deliver on that and stand out in a crowded genre.



1 Creatures and bosses in this game are frightening beings, and won't be easy to overcome. **2** You'll visit picturesque towns and cities as you learn more about Engardin.



Jessie Buckley, recently nominated for an Oscar for *The Lost Daughter*, is the star attraction of this instalment's ensemble.

“THE SETTING (AND CONTROLS)
HARK BACK TO CLASSIC
RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVAL HORROR.”

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 18 NOV / **PUB** BANDAI NAMCO ENTERTAINMENT
DEV SUPERMASSIVE GAMES / **PLAYERS** MULTI

The Dark Pictures: The Devil In Me

Shambling in the dark of the murder castle

Many a myth surrounds HH Holmes, who's regarded as America's first serial killer and who committed his crimes in the late 19th century. One of the most infamous is that he built his own hotel, which the press later nicknamed the 'Murder Castle', to lure in victims. Surely a ripe setting for a horror game, then.

For Supermassive Games' fourth and final instalment (well, for 'season one' at least; more appears to be on the way) in The Dark Pictures Anthology, the Lonnit Entertainment TV crew that makes Architects Of Murder are invited to tour a hotel that, it's claimed, is a faithful recreation of the infamous murder castle – right down to rooms designed to result in guests' creatively brutal deaths. It's clearly meant to be more than a static museum, as it contains plenty of mannequins to demonstrate these sadistic traps. Naturally, something tells us we're going to find ourselves having a much more live demonstration.

WALKING TOUR

As the setting's a three-storey 19th century building with deadly traps, as well as being comparable to earlier Dark Pictures it harks back to classic Resident

Evil survival horror, which may explain why our hands-on begins not as an interactive horror drama but with controller-based exploration. Wisely, the devs have avoided old-school tank controls, and introduced more variety in movement animations so that we can jump over gaps, vault over tables blocking the middle of a corridor, and shimmy across tight spaces.

These new actions don't prevent

controls from feeling somewhat sluggish, as we try to control key grip Jamie without coming to a dead stop at a wall or bumping into cameraman Mark or presenter Kate. Soon enough, we're separated from some of the crew after a floor caves in beneath our feet, sending us to an even more dilapidated section of the hotel's unfinished spa. With only Mark for protection (Kate ended up elsewhere), it's a spa that's far from relaxing...

We wouldn't describe bumping our way around in the dark the best time of this demo, with little but a jump scare involving a dummy on the floor getting dragged through a vent. Nonetheless, when we finally make it to a less cramped area, we come across two more dummies, except this time they're chained to a pillar with a buzzsaw in the middle. That this device only leads to a porcelain torso being cut in half

FACTRICK

1. TRUE HORROR

The real HH Holmes confessed to 27 murders, but was only convicted of one. He got the death penalty.

2. HIDING TIME

One new exploration mechanic is the ability to hide – but exactly who are we hiding from?

3. RESIDENT DEVIL

An inventory; puzzles to solve – it's almost like Resident Evil, only without the zombies and guns.

TRACK RECORD

Supermassive Games broke out with 2015 sleeper hit Until Dawn. This pivot to interactive horror continues to define the studio's current era, with The Quarry releasing alongside The Dark Pictures.



» doesn't make it any less disturbing, foreshadowing occasions when victims are pitted against each other. Situations where your survival depends on you being culpable for another's gruesome demise are the very worst kind of traps.

DEADLY DECISIONS

Supermassive's perhaps keen to hold off revealing anything too gory at this early stage; the trap we come to as the demo reverts to interactive drama format is modest in design. Jamie and Mark find Kate again, except the latter has somehow got trapped inside a chamber, while sound recordist Erin is in another chamber next door, and both are running out of air. Turning a lever in the middle determines who lives and who suffocates to death, while both die if you choose to do nothing.

This horrible choice is only slightly lightened by a lack of context since we're playing this without having invested in the characters yet, although there seems to be an implication that Erin and Mark might be more than just colleagues, which would surely influence his decision. Unfortunately for him, it's Jamie who's making the call here.

This does, however, raise some questions. In past Dark Pictures games

(as well as Supermassive's other horror titles), it's been possible to complete a playthrough where everyone survives, so have we overlooked something when faced with this dilemma, or has the developer withheld a key item that could let us interact with something else? But given the many traps the murder castle has in store, it could also be possible that there are different routes that allow you to avoid these death chambers – though in doing so you might just find something even more diabolical.

We're intrigued, then, by how different Supermassive might be making its anthology's season finale, though we're also concerned by just how much of *The Devil In Me* will involve awkwardly shuffling around its locations instead of letting cutscenes drive the pacing of the roughly seven-hour narrative. If a second season is on the cards (otherwise cheese *will* be smelt), Supermassive will want to wrap the first one up on a screaming-pitch high.

IMPRESSIONS

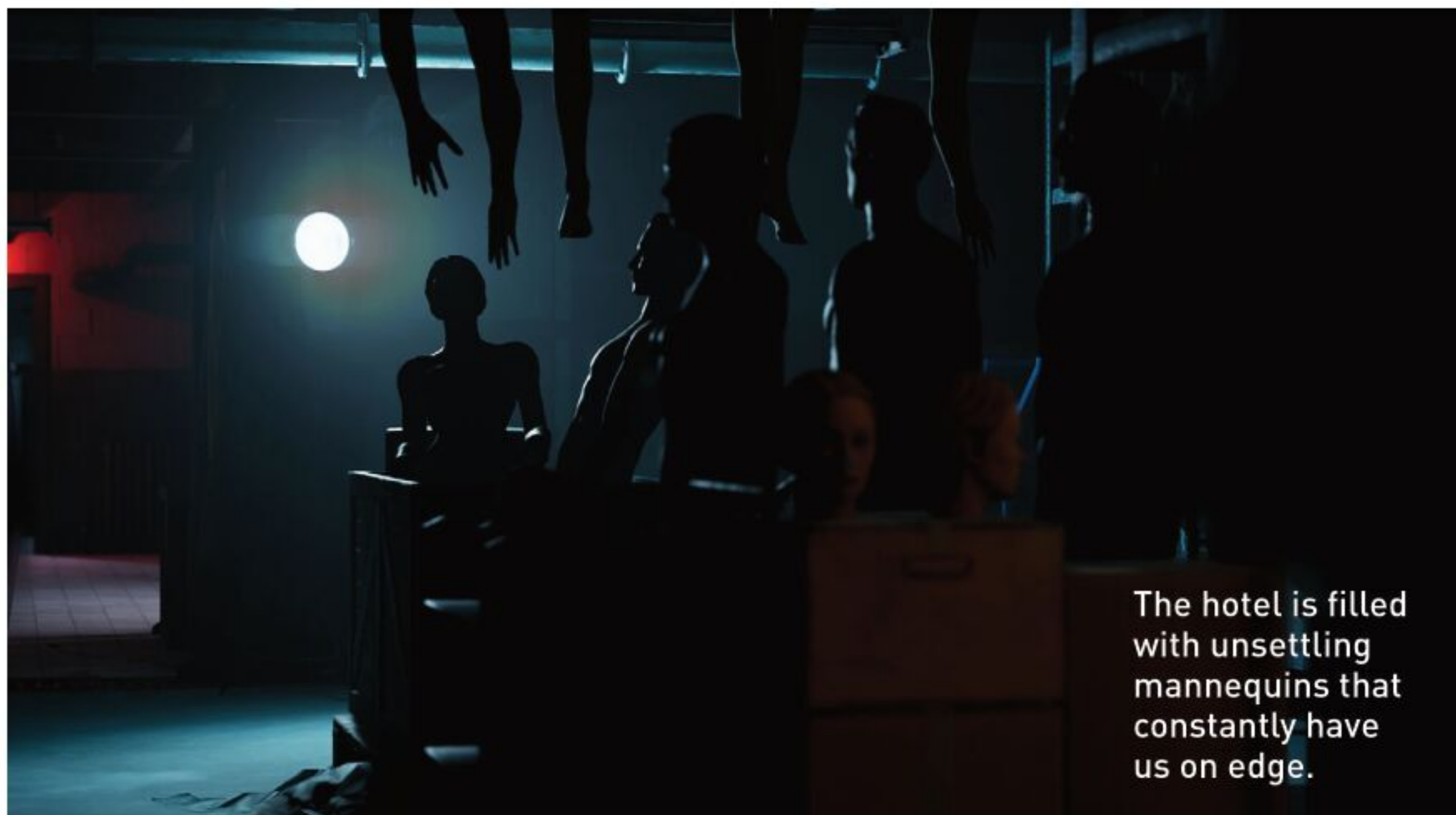
Surviving a series of deadly escape rooms is a novel twist for *The Dark Pictures'* concluding instalment. Here's hoping that its nods to classic survival horror don't work against it.



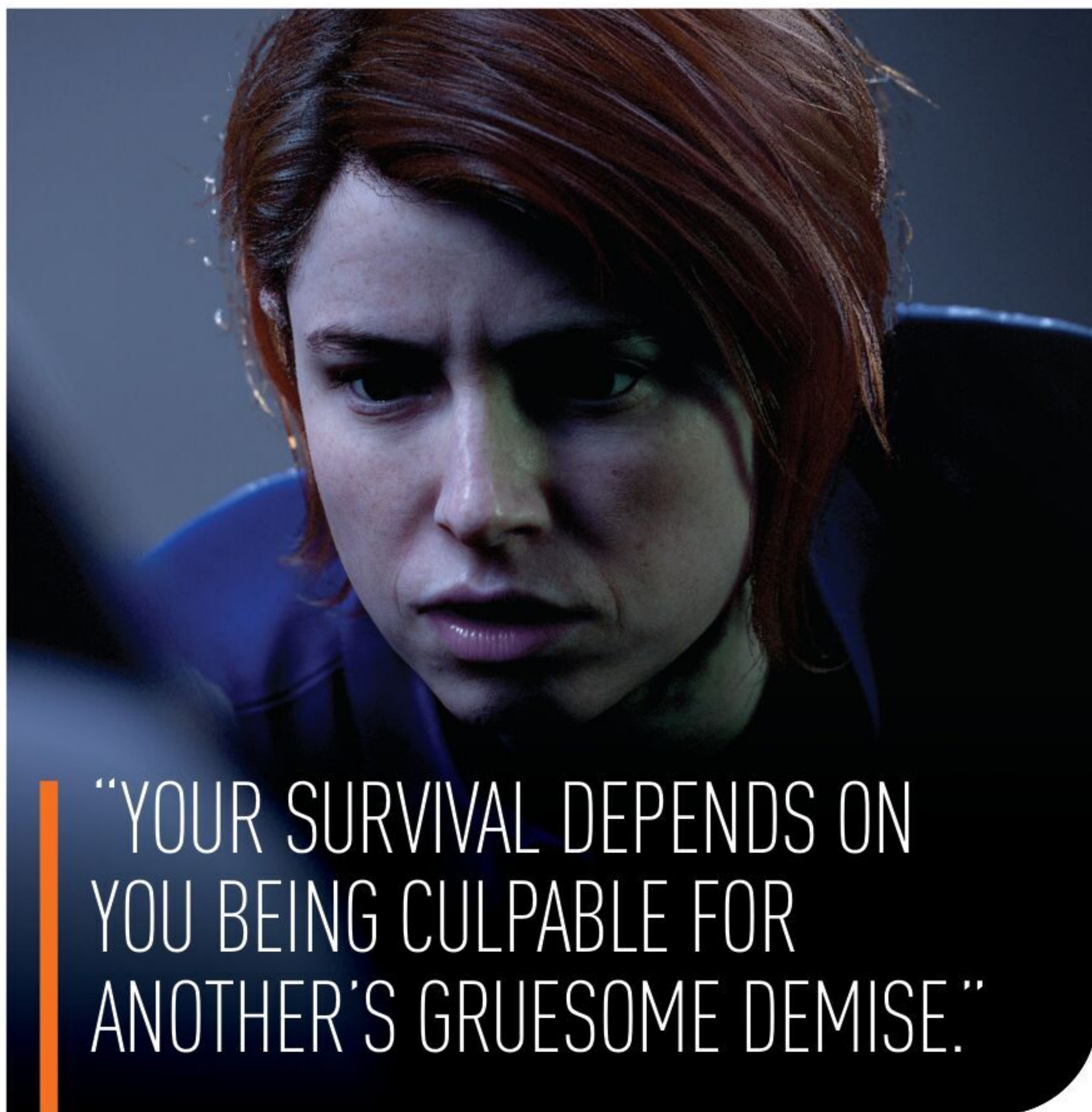
1 Charles Lonit, centre, is the documentary crew's director, although he's conspicuously absent during our demo. We'd love to know whether he's villain or victim. **2** We spend the majority of our demo playing as the crew's chief grip, Jamie. **3** The crew should stick together to stay safe... so, of course, the game splits you up. **4** Erin's the sound recordist, and her gear may prove helpful in helping you listen through walls.



PREVIEW



The hotel is filled with unsettling mannequins that constantly have us on edge.

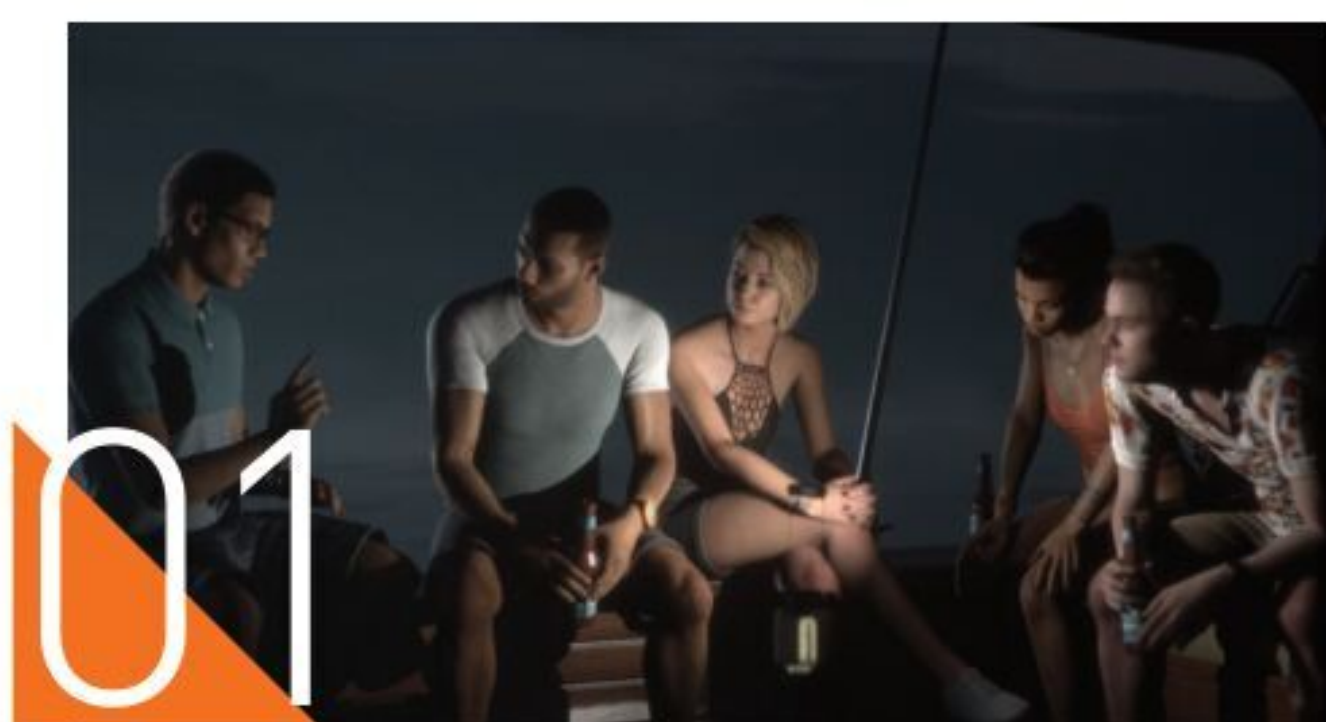


“YOUR SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON YOU BEING CULPABLE FOR ANOTHER’S GRUESOME DEMISE.”

The Dark Pictures so far



Catching up on the anthology’s first three instalments



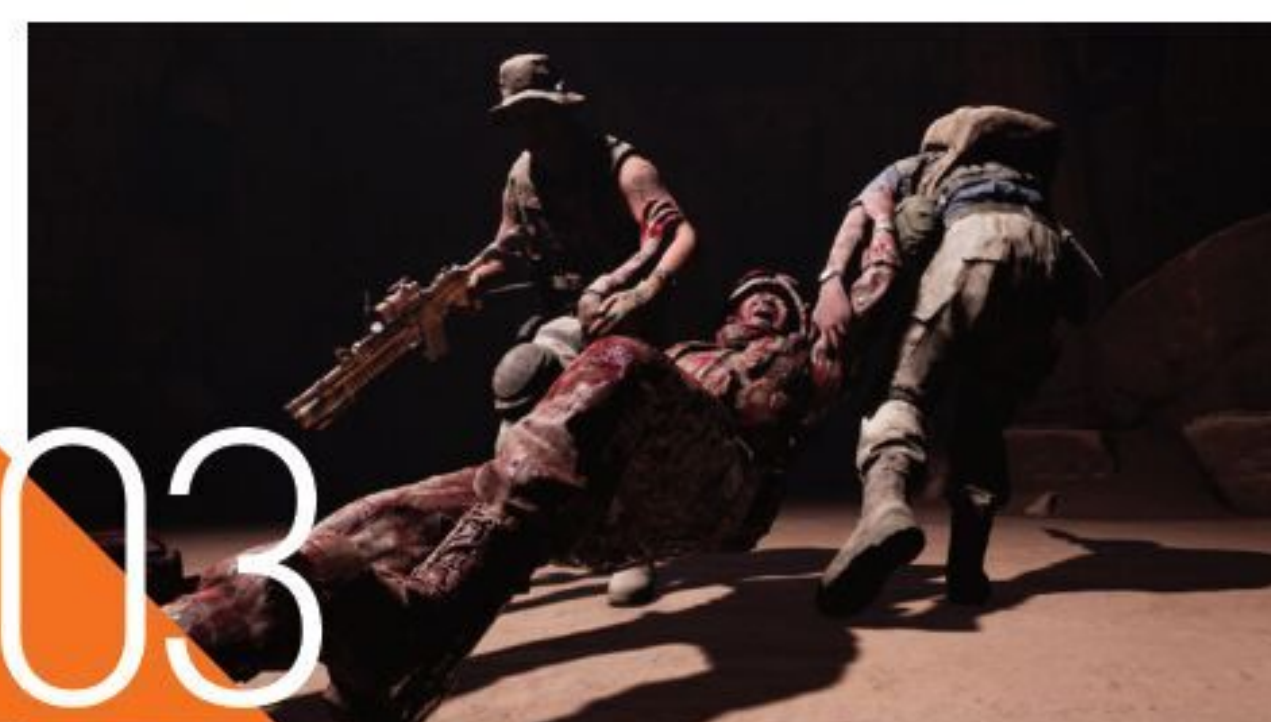
01

Man Of Medan kicked off the anthology: four college students and a boat captain encounter modern-day pirates and find themselves exploring a ghost ship.



02

Will Poulter stars in Little Hope across multiple timelines exploring the paranoia that led to witch hunts in colonial-era Massachusetts.



03

Set during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, House Of Ashes forces soldiers on both sides to work together to flee a subterranean temple and whatever lurks there.

FORMAT TBC / ETA TBC / PUB KRAFTON
DEV UNKNOWN WORLDS ENTERTAINMENT / PLAYERS 1-2

Moonbreaker

Shooting for the sky, the only way is up

We love miniatures but the thought of buying more fills us with the sort of panic we only ever feel during the end-game of a particularly fraught round of Tetris. Where are we going to put them? Besides that, where are all our paints and brushes from the last time we got sucked into this hobbyist hole? Oh, don't tell us they've all dried out and we need to buy more!?

So it's not hard to see the appeal of a *digital* miniatures game – especially when you've got prolific fantasy writer Brandon Sanderson in charge of worldbuilding. Moonbreaker will feature more than 50 units at launch, each unlockable through play. Strategic, turn-based skirmishes take place on lavishly realised diorama maps and yes, you *can* give a finely detailed, custom paint job to each of your units.

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

In development for the last five years, this science-fiction title takes cues from the likes of Guardians Of

The Galaxy and Firefly. The action takes place amid an array of moons known as The Reaches, where the scarce resource known as 'cinder' at each satellite's core starts as many fights as it ends.

You can hone your unit mastery and unlock new skills by either taking on other players online or plotting a course through various offline challenges, such as the procedurally generated Cargo Runs.

When you're not in the mood for turn-based action, you can while away the hours in the in-depth digital paint suite. If you want the whole gang to rock a pretty-in-pearlescent-pink 'fit, you can do that here. If you

FACTRICK

1. FANTASY FAMILIAR

Brandon Sanderson is the author of Mistborn and the writer who completed The Wheel Of Time series.

2. PAINT POD

Sanderson's lore is deep and you can listen to a Moonbreaker audio drama in-game while painting.

3. BUYING IN

Early Access playtesting begins on PC soon, with the PlayStation rollout yet to be firmed up (but it will come).

want your units to offer a taste of the rainbow with their looks, masking features make painting fine details even easier than in real life. Regardless of your preferred aesthetic, there's a wealth of options to help you achieve the look you desire as well as plenty of presets if you'd rather just get stuck into a match with a new unit. And in addition to the Captains and Crew units available at launch, a slew of content is slated for release post-

launch – this game will be far from mini.

IMPRESSIONS

We love turn-based tactics but can you tell we're also excited about painting up a storm? The full monetisation strategy remains to be revealed but we'll be given 50 units at the outset, which is generous.

TRACK RECORD

Moonbreaker is a complete change of pace for the developer that also brought you Subnautica. That game debuted on PS4 in 2018, and invited players to immerse themselves in a waterlogged battle for survival.

PREVIEW

"PROLIFIC FANTASY WRITER BRANDON SANDERSON IS IN CHARGE OF WORLDBUILDING."

gamesradar.com/playmag

PLAY | 03

PREVIEW

“PROLIFIC FANTASY WRITER BRANDON SANDERSON IS IN CHARGE OF WORLDBUILDING.”

gamesradar.com/playmag

PLAY

Tintin Reporter: Cigars Of The Pharaoh

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** EARLY 2023 / **PUB** MICROIDS
DEV MOULINSART / **PLAYERS** 1

What better genre for an adaptation of everyone's favourite Belgian reporter than the adventure game? Based on the graphic novel of the same name, *Cigars Of The Pharaoh* casts you in the role of Tintin, accompanied by Snowy the dog. When falsely accused of opium smuggling, Tintin ends up caught up in a conspiracy involving narcotics traders and the undiscovered tomb of Pharaoh Kih-Oskh. Expect to comb areas for clues and find items as you try to solve the mystery. Expect it to be faithful to the comic too, with an art style designed to convey Hergé's iconic art style (which has contributed to Tintin's enduring popularity). There's no Haddock in this one though, so you'd better buy it to make sure a sequel brings the barnacles.



Phantom Hellcat

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** TBC
PUB ALL IN! GAMES / **DEV** IRONBIRD CREATIONS / **PLAYERS** 1

When her mother's kidnapped, Jolene has to step up and take centre stage in getting her back. We mean that literally; our half-masked protagonist has to hack-and-slash through a dreamy world of performances, with some fights taking place on the boards of a stage spotlit by overhead lights, 2D platforming sections featuring shifting backdrops, and a mysterious figure watching from the best seats in the house. While the platforming reminds us of noughties indie games, the combat is definitely of interest. Jolene wields powers of her own: her aetherial sword can pull off some dazzling combos, and she's able to turn into smoke to perform a well-time dodged to exit stage left, pursued by an enemy.



Vengeful Guardian: Moonrider

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** SPRING 2022 / **PUB** THE ARCADE CREW
DEV JOYMASHER / **PLAYERS** 1

Having stolen our retro hearts with the Contra-like Blazing Chrome, Joymasher is back at it again with another throwback to the 16-bit era. It's set in a grim future when a totalitarian state rules all – and then the rulers seal their own fate by constructing the ultimate robot ninja, Moonrider. Intended to lay down the law, he instead rebels to take down the state that made him. That means plenty of tight platforming through delightfully grimy industrial levels and cut-through robo-enemies. Inspired by the likes of Strider, Moonrider features fluid movement and snappy combat to make sure that wall jumps and dances with death feel responsive.



Tactics Ogre: Reborn

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** 11 NOV
PUB SQUARE ENIX / **DEV** SQUARE ENIX
PLAYERS 1

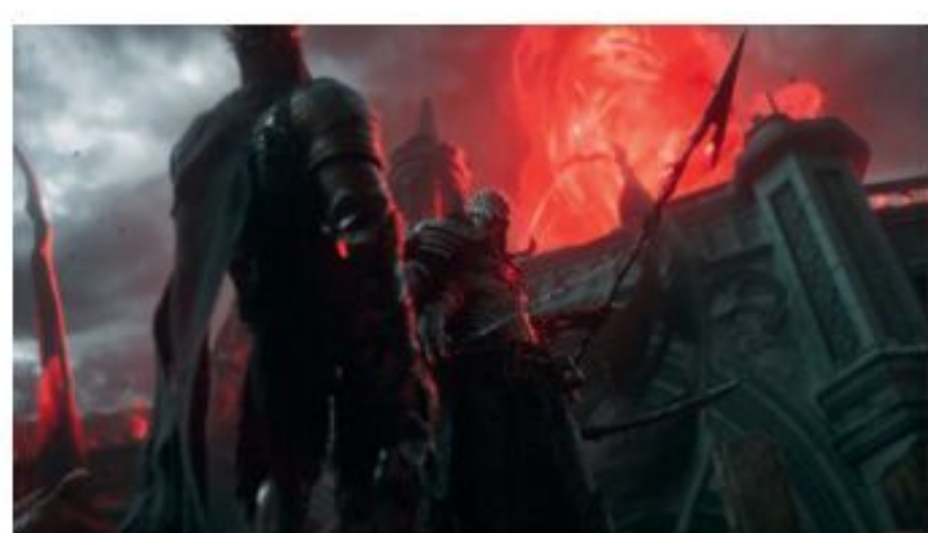
The original Tactics Ogre, of which this is a remaster, was a landmark strategy RPG when it was released in 1995. Looks familiar? It shares DNA with Final Fantasy Tactics, as Tactics Ogre creator Yasumi Matsuno went on to helm that game's development. Reborn is based on the 2010 PSP remake, Let Us Cling Together, but takes things a bit further with even more improvements. The biggest of these is revised levelling, which is now unit-by-unit, allowing you to make truly wide-reaching decisions about how you build your team. Already supporting a branching narrative, this is an RPG that adapts to you as a player. Add in new voice acting, and this is the complete package.



Killer Klowns From Outer Space: The Game

FORMAT PS4 / **ETA** 2023
PUB GOOD SHEPHERD ENTERTAINMENT
DEV TERAVISION GAMES / **PLAYERS** 1

What is it with game adaptations of '80s movies being asymmetrical online multiplayer? The trend might feel played out, but you can't deny that – just like the bizarre movie it's based on – Killer Klowns is bringing something unexpected to the table, as instead of the usual 1v4 it pits three clown players against seven humans. As the former, your task is to harvest the residents of Crescent Cove, working together to cause as much devastation as possible. The latter, meanwhile, need to hide and scavenge to power up if they want to stop the invasion. With a randomly generated map, matches should be unpredictable.



The Lords Of The Fallen

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2023
PUB CI GAMES / **DEV** HEXWORKS
PLAYERS 1-2

How's sticking a 'the' in front of a title for adding a classy vibe? But despite lacking a '2' (and having almost exactly the same name as the original), this isn't a reboot of PS4 soulslike Lords Of The Fallen, though it is described as a "spiritual" sequel. It'll run on Unreal Engine 5 (though we've only seen a CG trailer so far), and we're promised a bigger world and "deeper RPG systems" than the first game boasted. It'll also introduce co-op to the series. One thousand years after the last adventure, you'll explore a world split into the realms of the living and of the dead. This is the debut project of Hexworks, which has taken over the series since Deck13 moved on to work on The Surge.



Dune: Awakening

FORMAT PS5 / **ETA** 2022 / **PUB** FUNCOM
DEV FUNCOM / **PLAYERS** MULTI

Fear might be the mind killer, but excitement can wreck your thought processes too. With blustering cloth physics, wonderfully rendered hair that blows in the harsh breeze of Arrakis, and a ruddy great sandworm, this announcement thrills at first – but only a CG trailer has been revealed so far. Described as an "open world survival MMO", it has a similar vibe to Conan Exiles. Considering it's being made by the same developer, that makes sense, so expect something similar yet evolved for the new gen.

The Rumble Fish 2

FORMAT PS5, PS4 / **ETA** SUMMER 2022 / **PUB** 3G00 / **DEV** 3G00
PLAYERS 1-2

At a glance you'll recognise The Rumble Fish 2 as part of the wave of '00s Japanese fighters with flashy animation and gorgeous pixel art, but you'd be forgiven for not quite knowing exactly which one it is. That's because it's been limited to arcades since its 2005 release, receiving an overhaul in 2012 but, again, only in arcades. Despite retaining popularity in Japan, it's something that might have passed you by. That's a shame, as the quirky cast of fighters are animated on a limb-by-limb basis, making fights feel extra-fluid. Add in widescreen support, rollback netcode, a practice mode, and behind-the-scenes content, and you have a blast from the past you won't want to miss.



F FORMAT PS5, PS4 **ETA** 28 OCT **PUB** ACTIVISION
DEV INFINITY WARD **PLAYERS** MULTI

CHASING A GHOST

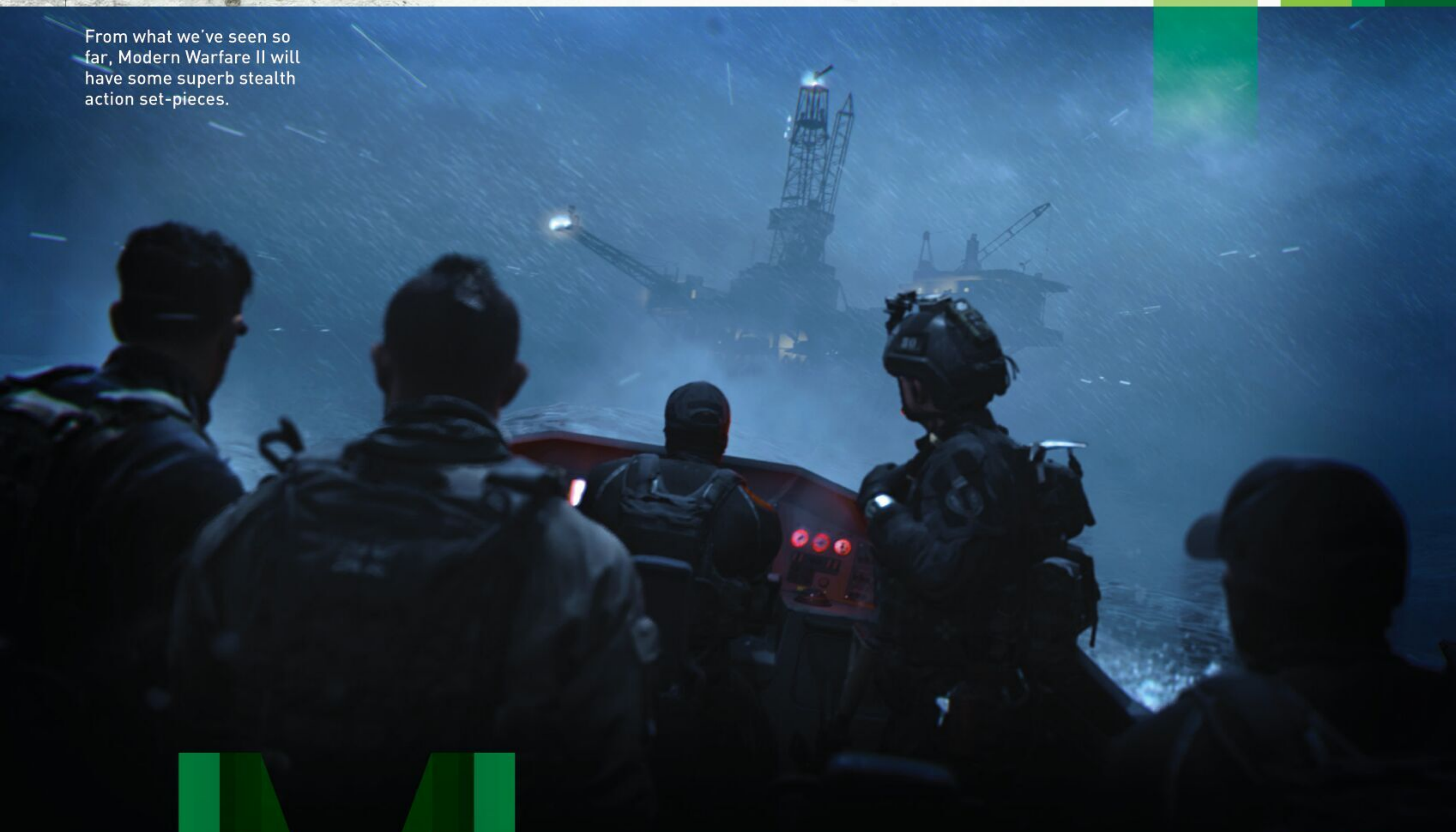
In **Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare II**'s campaign, teamwork is the ultimate weapon. Writer Brian Bloom and director Jeff Negus brief Dashiell Wood on what's to come

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

From what we've seen so far, Modern Warfare II will have some superb stealth action set-pieces.



M

uch has changed since we last saw Task Force 141. We witnessed the formation of this fledgling unit in the final moments of Modern Warfare's post-credit scene; now the central characters of Modern Warfare II are scattered on deployments across the world.

However, with the world under threat from an alliance of enemies more dangerous than anything we've seen before, this single-player campaign makes it clear that squadding up is the only way to

survive. It's a spiritual successor to 2009's much-loved Modern Warfare 2; a cast of familiar faces and a few notable newcomers are gearing up for a fresh globetrotting adventure.

SUITED AND (RE)BOOTED

It's been three years since the end of Modern Warfare, both within the in-game narrative and in the real world. "Aside from flashbacks, and other things where we let you know there's been a temporal shift, we respect the passage of time," explains Brian Bloom, who, as the writer of both Modern Warfare and its upcoming sequel, has been instrumental in shaping the direction the series has taken so far. "We thought, what's happening three years later? How is

"REBOOTING THE UNIVERSE GAVE US AN OPPORTUNITY, BUT ALSO A REALLY INTERESTING CONUNDRUM THAT WE'VE HAD SOME FUN WITH."

that team? How are those characters? How have those people come together, split up, and moved around the world and deployed?

"Rebooting the universe gave us an opportunity, but also a really interesting conundrum that we've had some fun with," he continues, "which is to think about how to repurpose certain names, certain factions, certain characters, how to confound expectation on who they might be if you see them, but also deliver to a certain extent on expectations. We're playing with those faders on the narrative mixing board here."

Series newbies and lapsed fans won't need to worry too much about whether they've played the original Modern Warfare trilogy or the recent reboot, as the plot of this entry is designed to be as accessible as possible to new players. "It might be a

good spot to mention that this, like the original or like [Modern Warfare] 2019, is a reimagining of the series," adds Jeff Negus, the game's director at Infinity

Ward. "It isn't a sequel to one of the older games, it isn't trying to be." That's not to say fans of the series won't notice any callbacks to the

ALL FOR 141, 141 FOR ALL!

From Task Force 141 and beyond, some of our Modern Warfare II squad reports in



KYLE 'GAZ' GARRICK

One of the trio of playable protagonists in the first Modern Warfare, we see Sergeant Garrick (or Gaz for short) picked up by Captain Price during the events of the campaign. As one of the youngest members of 141, Gaz has plenty to prove.



SIMON 'GHOST' RILEY

With a past shrouded in mystery and a face shrouded by a creepy skull-faced mask, this menacing member is better known by his alias, Ghost. An expert in covert operations, Ghost is a perfect pick if you need something done undetected.



JOHN PRICE

When it comes to both combat and facial hair, Captain Price is second to none. A soldier since his teens, a member of the SAS, and the original founder of Task Force 141, Price has played a central role in every incarnation of the series so far.



JOHN 'SOAP' MACTAVISH

Although he was notably absent from the narrative of Modern Warfare 2019, we know from playing past games that MacTavish is one of the best. We can only assume he gained the unusual nickname 'Soap' for his squeaky-clean combat record.



ALEJANDRO VARGAS

Joining the team from Los Vaqueros, a specialist unit within Mexican special forces, Vargas isn't technically a member of 141, but that doesn't mean that we won't be seeing plenty of him and his squadmates during Modern Warfare II's campaign.



1

2

» previous games, though. “This is a sequel to 2019,” he says, “and we have this cool opportunity to reimagine elements of the series in new ways and different ways.”

“This was a conscious choice as well, to make sure that the first game wasn’t something that you needed to have experienced in order to get a lot out of this,” he continues. “There are things that will enhance, in certain ways I think, the story if you have played [Modern Warfare] 2019 as you will have spent more time with these characters and know what they’ve gone through [...] but it definitely isn’t a prerequisite to having a great time with this new game and understanding things and getting a lot out of it narratively.”

BACK IN ACTION

The original Modern Warfare 2’s campaign is fondly remembered by both critics and series fans, so we are eager to find out how this entry will build upon the story of its spiritual predecessor. “We know that the audience has grown and also evolved, and that what flew and what was

accepted and what was loved is all absolutely valid,” Bloom explains, “but there’s an opportunity to take some characters that had a little bit more of a decidedly two-dimensional presentation at the time, and yet still became legendary, and add more of a spectrum, more dimensions to who they are.”

He highlights the example of Ghost, saying “I think everybody would agree he’s a man of few words, a lone wolf. You might gather that he

1 These funky night vision goggles could give Sam Fisher a run for his money. 2 The members of Task Force 141 are spread out across the world in smaller fireteams when we catch back up with them. What brings them together again? 3 With the focus on Ghost this time around, covert operations could be a big focus of the campaign.

likes to work alone, although he never really said that, and you might think ‘Well, what are the characteristics or traits that would be associated with the man behind the mask?’ [...] If you

3





CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II

believe that story is character and character is story, which I think we do, you will wholeheartedly embrace that. So you've got a guy who's a lone wolf, who is now part of a team. What affects what his mindset, ideology, approach to tactics, and strategies have on that team? [...] We worked using some of those elements and kind of put them in the pot and cooked them up."

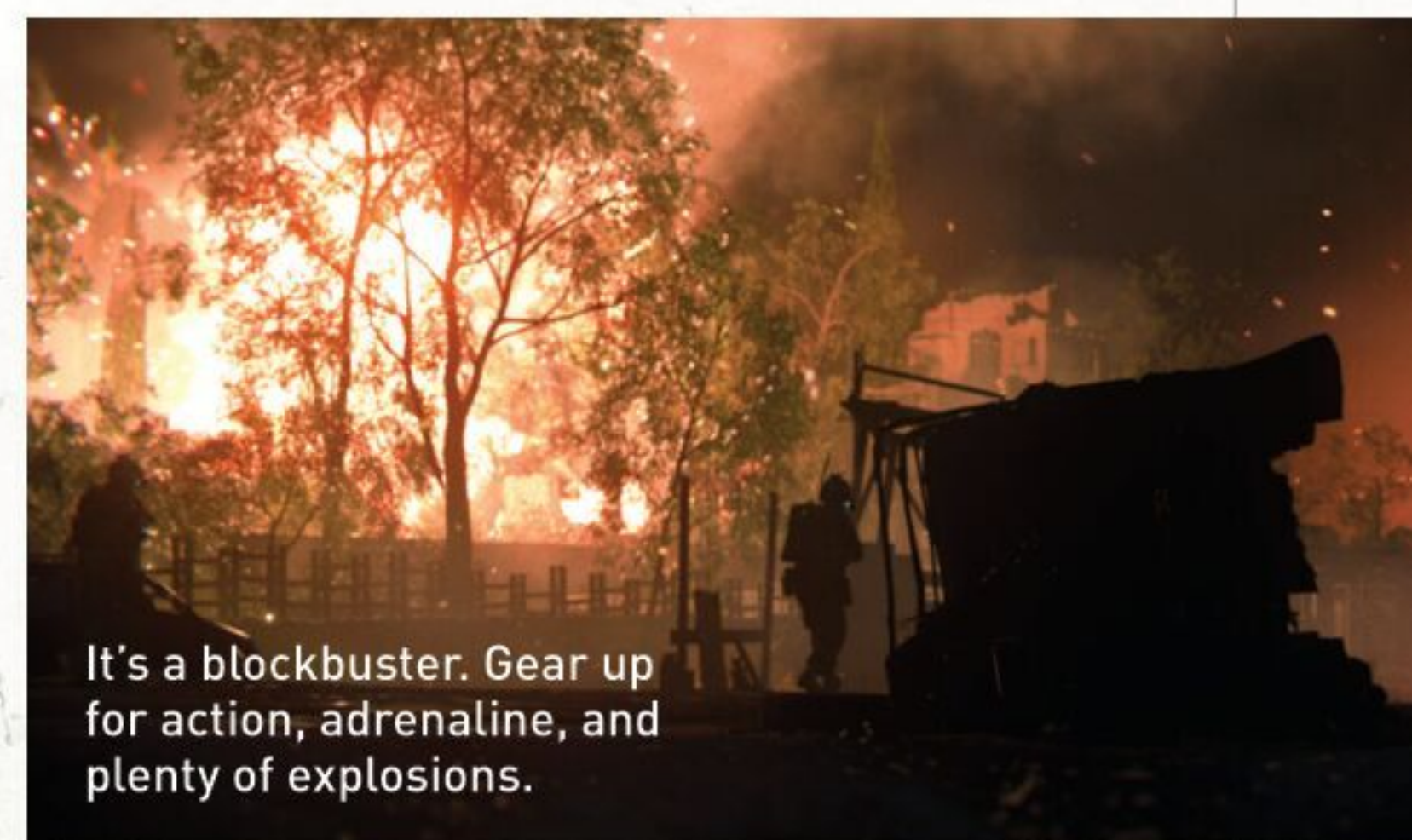
"It's so important to reimagine these characters and make them more

"THEY GAVE ME THE NAME OF AN INDIVIDUAL, AND I CAN'T TELL YOU WHO HE IS, BECAUSE IF I DID HE'D KILL ME, BUT THEY GAVE ME THAT NAME."

three-dimensional and update them for an audience that's grown not only in size, but also in what they're expecting out of a triple-A videogame," adds Negus. "Another piece of that, when it comes to the series, as we did in [Modern Warfare] 2019, is to add new characters in addition to those old ones, and build out a different world that wasn't

explored before – both locationally and emotionally. That comes from new people, new faces, and not just resting on our laurels in terms of taking from the brand that's already been created."

One of these new characters is Alejandro Vargas, an elite member of a Mexican special forces unit known as Los Vaqueros, who will



It's a blockbuster. Gear up for action, adrenaline, and plenty of explosions.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE II



» accompany 141 through parts of the campaign. Vargas' exact role in the game's narrative has been subject to much speculation. "It's interesting that some people do think that he's a new member of 141. I think to clarify this character is not a new member of 141. He's very much a member of the special forces in Mexico," says Bloom.

"I think what makes him even more interesting than just being another member of 141 [...] is that he grows from his own environment and continues to prosecute targets in his own world. We had an opportunity here to say, 'Well, if 141 [...] needed help, and the story took us to [Mexico], who would they call for help? Alejandro is that first person and so are his Los Vaqueros and his second-in-command Rudolpho. [...] We didn't want to have 141 come down to Mexico and solve everybody else's problems and be the saviour. [They] were looking to find a saviour there for *them*. And I think that's a

1 Could wearing sunglasses on top of a face-covering mask become the new cool? We say yes. **2** The light from fires and explosions will look fantastic on PS5. **3** With updated visuals, fan-favourite characters, like Gaz here, have never looked better. **4** Modern Warfare has always been a global series. We're expecting to see lots of new locations this time around.

sort of a different positioning that we haven't seen a lot of and we were excited to explore that positioning as we developed Alejandro."

THIS IS LAS ALMAS

Anchoring Modern Warfare II's globetrotting narrative is the fictionalised region of Las Almas. "We created this fictional place called Las Almas, the City Of Souls," explains Bloom, "and when Ghost and Soap arrive in Mexico, Soap says, 'I've never been to Mexico.' He tells Alejandro and Alejandro goes out of his way to tell them, 'This isn't Mexico, this is Las Almas.' So he

becomes our kind of reliable narrator on this journey into a new place that has its own rules and its own set of problems and its own challenges."

Much like the presentation of Urzikstan in Modern Warfare, the team were careful to ground their depiction of fictionalised cultures in real-world research. "We're sensitive to the cultures. We're excited to look at the cultures. We're excited to look at the places. So as we're doing our research for some of the Mexican elements of the story we were in touch with the DEA and Mexican special forces. We had a contact and I thought, let's start with exactly where



141 would have started and ask ‘If you had to get into a foxhole in this area of the world, who would it be with?’ They gave me the name of an individual, and I can’t tell you who he is, because if I did he’d kill me, but they gave me that name and I got in touch with this person and interviewed them for countless hours.

“I learned about who they were and what they were up against, what their successes and failures and challenges were, their colloquialisms and language and all kinds of things.” Vargas isn’t a copy, however. Bloom is careful to clarify that “we didn’t base Alejandro on this person, but a lot of the DNA and some of the first principal aspects of creating the character came from that research. We work with language experts and there are so many technical advisors that we’re fortunate to have at our fingertips here.”

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Mexico won’t be the only country we’re visiting, however. “Part of the

DNA of Modern Warfare is that we’re in lots of different places,” says Negus, “so I think this game thematically is about unholy alliances and that means it could be several different places all over the world.”

At its core, the campaign’s narrative is going to be a story of teamwork, with the team coming

“I THINK THIS GAME THEMATICALLY IS ABOUT UNHOLY ALLIANCES.”

together to survive. “Ghost, being that lone wolf, will learn across the arc of this story that he can’t do everything alone,” adds Bloom. He clarifies: “In the same way that our enemies may get together to defeat us, our allies get together. So in the way that 141 is working with Alejandro and the Mexican special forces, some of our antagonists in this story are also plussing up in order to win.”

In terms of the force we’ll face, “It has a lot to do with the conscription of people in different areas on the other

side, and this idea of good and bad characters,” says Negus. “We still have a good amount of the original theme that war is grey and that there are hard choices to be made.”

However, the story’s focus remains predominantly on its central characters. “Rather than trying to find ways to shock the audience,

we’re trying to find ways to pull in the audience and make them a part of the conflict between the characters emotionally. Emotionally, what these characters are going

through is much more interesting to us than shocking the audience.”

There’s still much we don’t know about the campaign of Modern Warfare II, and Negus reiterates that “we really want to try to subvert as much as we can. Take what people like about [earlier games], but also maybe change them around so that what you’re expecting might not be the same thing. Lean into who these people are and create something different.” We look forward to being surprised this October. ■

Earning a Knighthood

WB Games Montréal's **Geoff Ellenor** and **Wilson Mui** talk about building their own take on Gotham City, and citizens from heroes to villains

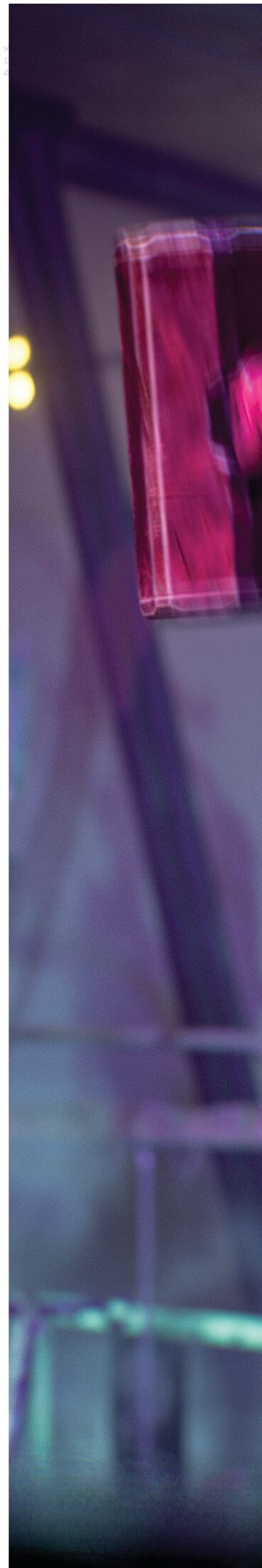
You can take Batman out of Gotham City (which has already happened in *Gotham Knights* owing to his untimely and unfortunate demise), but his long, indelible shadow still falls across its mean streets. In this eagerly anticipated game you play – either solo or with friends in co-op – his successors. Batgirl, Nightwing, Robin, and Red Hood must work together to live up to Batman's cowl and protect the city, as villains move into the power vacuum and a years-long conspiracy is revealed.

It's quite the task – too much for one person. Like the *Knights*, the team at WB Games Montréal have come together to get the job done. We sit down with game director Geoff Ellenor and cinematics director Wilson Mui to put the pieces together ourselves.

PLAY: How did you both come to join WB Games Montréal? Was DC a draw?

Geoff Ellenor: It was definitely part of it. [...] I've always been intrigued by Gotham, the city. I've always been a Batman fan, I read the comics as a kid, so there seemed to be a nice synergy.

Wilson Mui: Kind of similar to Geoff. I mean, we »



We've seen plenty of Harley lately, but in *Gotham Knights* she's as much 'influencer' as 'criminal mastermind'.



“There’s a butt thing for Nightwing out there that we need to appease the fans with!”

» come from similar experiences. The team here is fantastic. The DC Universe obviously is a huge library of things that could materialise. The big draw point for me here, though, from my standpoint, I’m gonna be a bit selfish here, is when [Patrick Redding, creative director] and Geoff pitched the idea that I would have to kill Batman. And I was like, ‘All right. Sure, why not? Let’s try that out!’

GE: It was memorable.

WM: It was memorable. It hasn’t been an easy ride. But I think we’ve managed to do something pretty awesome.

PLAY: A big move! How did that come about?

GE: Very early in our creative process we were throwing around ideas about what we wanted to do. We love the idea of playing with friends. A lot of us – myself, especially – come from making multiplayer games, and I love that social aspect of being able to play games that you can play with your friends. That led us into a discussion of all these amazing, essentially, you know, sidekicks – these Bat Family members that have worked with Batman – who would be cool heroes to play in a videogame. At some point, Pat Redding, our creative director, said, “What would it be like for them to have to get up the next day and go do Batman’s job if Batman wasn’t there?” That became a really energising idea for the team, and we just ran with that almost immediately. That became the creative driver right away: Batman’s dead, Gotham’s in trouble, and you have to go out there and save it. We’ve been rolling that since like, I would say the first week or second week of conception. It was a really early idea. We got excited about it early on, and it’s been shaping the fantasy of Gotham Knights ever since.

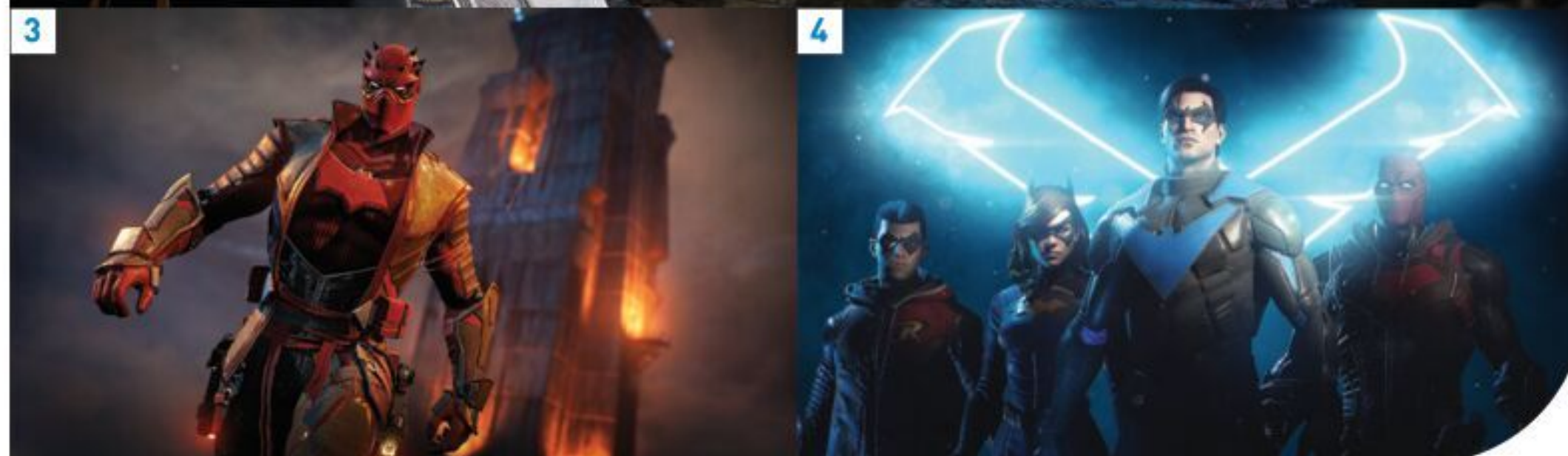
WM: For my part the first initial excitement was, yes, Batman is going to die in our game. But actually, the biggest thing for me was exactly what Geoff mentioned with ‘What are the four heroes going to feel like from that?’ How’s Nightwing, how’s Robin, how’s Red Hood,



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2



3



4

1 Geoff Ellenor began his career on multiplayer titles, working on *Ghostbusters: The Videogame*, *Splinter Cell: Conviction* and *Blacklist*, and *For Honor*. 2 Each hero has their own playstyle. Find your groove with each one. 3 Of course, your heroes are stylish; there are different suits to wear. 4 The game centres on bringing the Bat Family together in the wake of a tragedy, turning them from relative strangers into a superteam.

how’s Batgirl going to react to this emotional toll of losing their mentor? And that, from the cinematic standpoint, from the storytelling standpoint, from my side, and for the team as well, is an untouched area – we don’t see much of that.

That was really a thing that I think we nailed in terms of how they would feel, how they interact with each other, how they are dealing with that emotional struggle inside. That’s [a journey] that is usually reserved for TV or film. We’re trying to bridge that best that we can right now. And I think we’ve managed to do some really emotional moments here in our game, and

NEED TO KNOW

LOOK BAT
IN ANGER

A quick rundown
of WB Games
Montréal's previous
Batman games

2013

BATMAN: ARKHAM
ORIGINS

This Arkhamverse
prequel set on one long
Christmas night had
Batman and Joker meet
for the first time. A
rollicking story with an
excellent, snowy rendition
of Gotham.

2015

BATMAN: ARKHAM
KNIGHT – RED HOOD
STORY PACK

The first of a range of DLC
made to support
Rocksteady's base game,
it started the studio's
history with the 'Hood. It
then made a few more
including...

2015

BATMAN: ARKHAM
KNIGHT – BATGIRL:
A MATTER OF FAMILY

Perhaps the best of the
Arkham Knight DLC
bunch, this had Batgirl
exploring the abandoned
Seagate Amusement
Park to rescue her father,
Commissioner Gordon,
from the Joker.

that's very, I think, hitting out of the park. I'm really excited to see the fans react to that.

PLAY: Do you think the immersive nature of games you spend a lot of time playing can help with that kind of storytelling?

WM: We have something very unique here in gaming, because if you're sitting watching television or film, you're just sitting there watching. As players investing in a videogame, we're spending countless hours beating up baddies in Gotham City, powering up, getting your nice costume, your new suit, getting those power upgrades, and then really seeing the storytelling support that process.

I think, for us, that's been a big success in our project, seeing how the heroes kind of interact with each other. Both in the constant VO, but also the cinematics, you'll kind of see how they deal with the death of their mentor, and they kind of rely a lot on each other. And the four of them together has never really been a thing. You'll see actually, in the beginning of the game, they're not used to working with each other. So you'll see a lot of tension there. You're gonna see a lot of like, 'I had to deal with Batman, now I have to deal with the three of you guys or girls.' And it opens up a lot of really interesting opportunities for us to explore the narrative and storytelling.

GE: As a long-term gamer myself, I think you opt into the story more. I feel more engaged in storytelling when I'm playing a game. [...] I think that's what's great about the story of Gotham Knights. It is a satisfying, meaty combat videogame that also has as a story of the heart, that has a group of people who initially struggled to like each other, coming from different ages and emotional context to the death of their mentor, and really becoming a Bat Family and working together, having each other's backs, and collaborating to save the city. I think it's cool that we've achieved a story that has this kind of subtlety, and it's really fresh. We got to tell the story in Gotham City, a place that has hundreds of amazing stories, and we got to make a new one.

We're all just really, really hyped that we were able to do that.

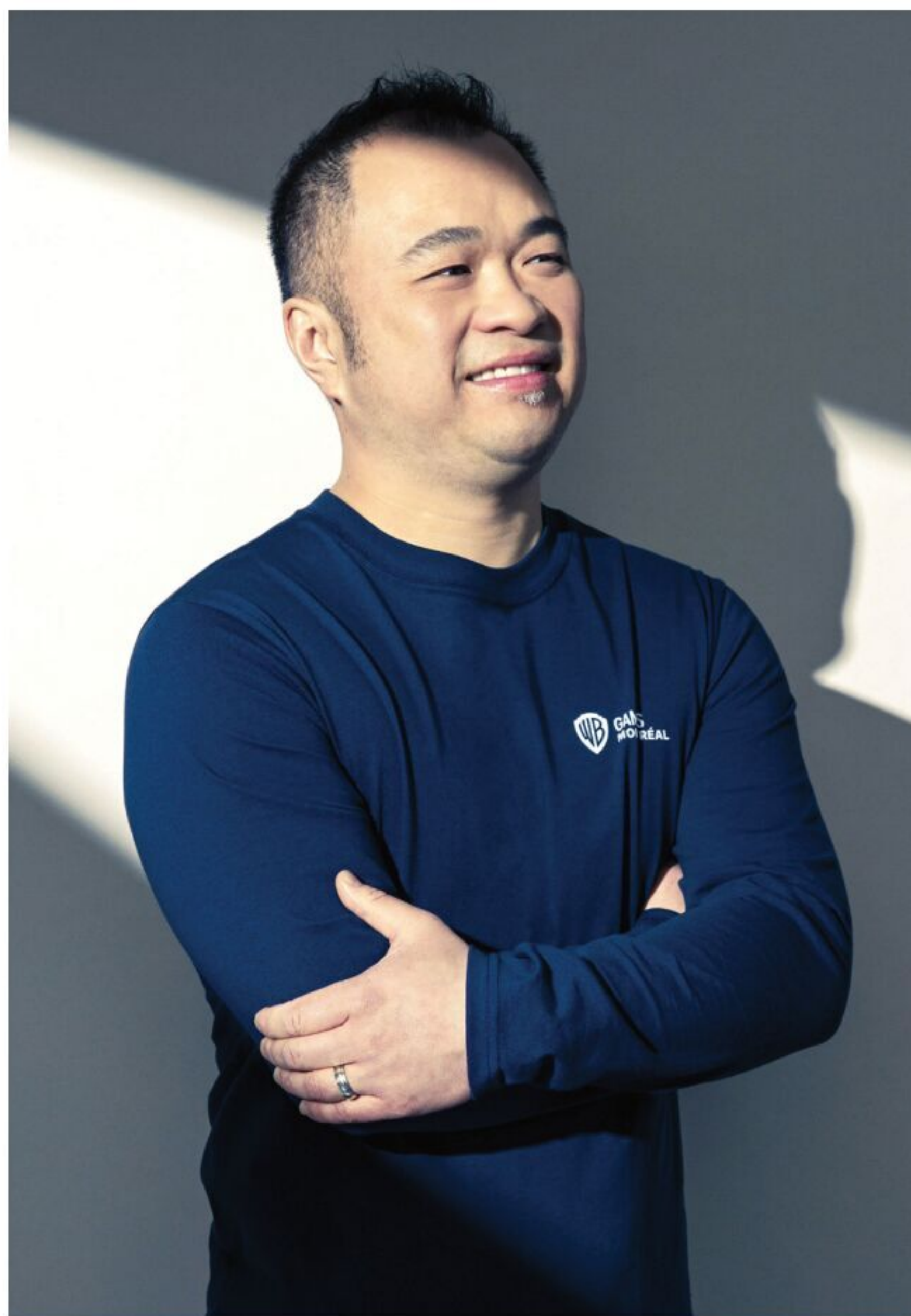
WM: Actually, Oscar, just to be on the record, we actually made four [stories], not just one!

GE: That's actually true. [laughter] That's actually true! You will not see all of it in a single playthrough. Just because there's so much content that is unique to the hero's perception of what's going on and what's happened.

PLAY: Because you can play pretty much any mission as any hero, right? How did you go about making those distinct?

WM: So from the cinematic standpoint, it's very, very, very challenging. [...] Structurally, we're gonna have a very similar scene that overall falls in the flow for each character, but each character has their own version of that. So because, you know, they move differently, they speak differently, they have different histories with all the different characters, it allows us to make a scene that would be their version of that. If you were to look and play Batgirl, you're gonna get Batgirl's version, but if you play Robin, you're gonna get Robin's version of that same scene. Some of them are very similar in how they do it, but they're gonna have little subtle differences.

I joke, but in Nightwing's version of one of the scenes with Harley [Quinn], we have a butt shot because, you know, there's a butt thing for Nightwing out there that we need to appease the fans with! So these are little subtleties that we've kind of added into each of these scenes that try to make it as customisable for each each hero



Formerly of Ubisoft and Eidos Montréal, Wilson Mui's previously worked on major titles such as Assassin's Creed, Tomb Raider, and more.

PLAY: Damn, that sounds like a lot of work!

WM: It is a lot of work! I actually... when you were saying that I just blanked out for a minute and I was like, 'Man, that was a lot of work.'

GE: We joke that we made four games all the time, because there's a lot in Gotham Knights.

PLAY: Fans of each hero will surely love that detail, speaking as a bit of a Nightwing fan myself.

WM: Nice! So you appreciate the butt shots, then! [laughs]

PLAY: Warner Bros. of course has Rocksteady's Arkham universe as well. And Gotham Knights is a completely new thing in its own setting. How did you approach making sure it felt immediately distinct?

GE: I mean, it was easy for us in a way – we get asked that question a lot – but it was easy for us because we set out doing something that was its own game in its own universe, right down to the tech. Like, the engine of Gotham Knights was built for Gotham Knights from scratch. So we didn't inherit any baggage really from other games or other game universes. As we built we did everything to ensure that the game was its own entity, essentially, because from day one that's what we were making the whole time.

PLAY: What would you say defines your interpretation of Gotham City?

GE: I mean, we had certain slogans that kind of shaped our expectations the whole time, [such as]



1
2

1 He's a freeze spirit. Mr Freeze is just one villain reeling from unfinished business with the now-deceased Batman. 2 Robin's quick, putting his bo to good use alongside pilfered Justice League tech. 3 Red Hood juggles using his guns to keep his distance with jumping into the fray, using traps to good effect. 4 Nightwing is the most agile of the bunch as a former circus performer. If you play as him, expect to dazzle your foes with flips aplenty.

» 'There's always crime in Gotham City'. And we wanted you to feel like as you master the city, you really learn stuff about it. There are nooks and crannies and cracks and secret shortcuts in Gotham City that we're really proud of. It's a *dense* city. And I think that's what makes it unique. I've been playing Gotham Knights for about 400 hours, 500 hours, in this current version of our product as we get closer to the end of the game, and I still occasionally go around a corner and go, 'Oh, wow, that's there. I didn't know.' And I think that is really unique to the project, that our Gotham is big, but also just filled with all of these interesting little spaces with different things going on.

PLAY: How does that density of design affect player activity in the city?

GE: We made our gameplay systems such that our activities can kind of break out in a variety of different places around the city. So every time you go back to the belfry, there are some main story beats that will be consistently waiting for you until you do them, but the gangs in Gotham City are very dynamic. What they decide to do every night is rerolled at the start of the night. So when you come back to the belfry it's daytime, when you go out on patrol at night, you're gonna see different stuff than you did the night before all the time. And I think that flexibility of our



systems makes it fun to fight crime in all of the different places that crime can break out.

PLAY: Speaking of that sort of day/night loop, is the passage of time something that's felt by the player?

GE: Yeah, what's happening in Gotham is reflective of what's going on in the story of Gotham Knights. So you will see a kind of constant evolution.

PLAY: We've now seen more of the villains that will be in the game. How do you decide which villains to include when you make a game like this?

GE: It was a long time ago.

WM: It's been a long time, yeah!

GE: I want to say it was a heated dispute from what I recall, because there are so many great choices. I'm very, very happy with the villains that we've come back with because they all have a unique story inside Gotham Knights that kind of fits with other things that's going on in our main story. The villains kind of show up and really take charge in whatever aspect that they're



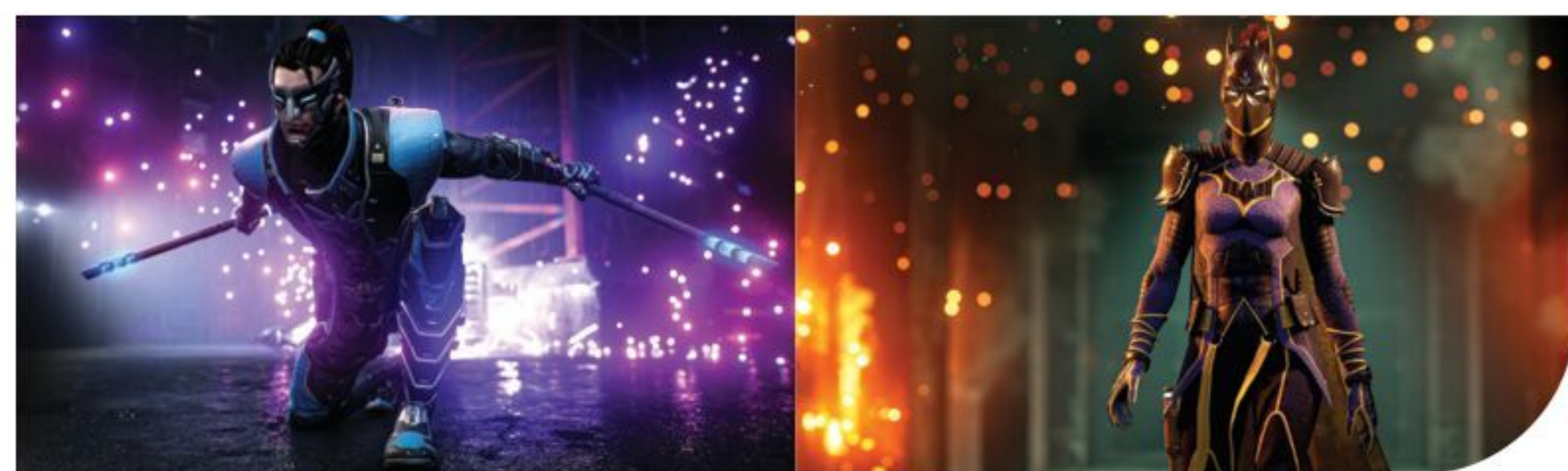
currently focusing on. Those villain stories, the villain arcs, they're really stories unto themselves. And we think that we chose the right [ones] to really deliver that. I think I'll just leave it at that.

WM: I'll throw in a little thing there. A lot of the villains that we have – so you're talking Harley Quinn, Clayface, and actually Mr Freeze for us – early on in the game you'll find out that they've had some unfinished business with Batman. So when Batman died, that business never got resolved. A lot of those backstories are things like that.

I won't spoil too many details, but it allows us to kind of bridge that a little bit better to kind of keep the player a little bit more invested in those storylines. But yeah, from our side, you're gonna see these villains have their own character arcs [that they] undergo with the heroes. And this is something that, from the story standpoint, it's something that was really great for us – to choose these villains [in particular].

PLAY: So there's a mystery element in unravelling the conspiracy behind the Court Of Owls. But a lot of combat too. How did you balance those parts with investigation bits?

GE: With excellent mission design, of course! [laughs] The story is always important to us. We have a variety of gameplay experiences, but it's always



It's up to you who to tackle the story as, as you're able to chop and change between characters, and upgrade all the members of the Bat Family to your liking.

You'll find out that the villains had some unfinished business with Batman.

tailored around when you go to a place to do something as one of the Knights. In any of our major story beats you're typically pulling on the thread of a mystery that led you there. So there's always a mixture of fights that you get into because bad guys are violent, and some of them deserve to be quietly choked out from behind, and trying to solve sort of detective puzzles. Batman famously is the world's greatest detective. This is the Bat Family who trained with Batman, who have some of his skills. And so they too are investigating to find out what's really going on in the story of Gotham Knights.

PLAY: In a lot of the game's promotional material, The Court Of Owls – a cabal of privileged string-pullers – has been pushed quite hard. Structurally, are they the main villains, or is it more of a case of different factions all over the city?

GE: I want to say yes and yes. The story of Gotham Knights really reflects our fantasy that the city is kind of the character that's always there in every chapter of the story. And our take on the Court Of Owls as this sort of old and mysterious, manipulative group of rich people that had been pulling strings in Gotham for hundreds of years does impact the whole story of the game... but you'll have to play to find out all the details. Because there's relationships between what [The Court Of Owls] wants to do, and the gangs kind of getting into their own kinds of chaos alongside them, and how our villain stories kind of intersect all that. It's complicated, but in a good way.

PLAY: We'll find out soon enough, considering the game release date has been moved forward [to 25 Oct]. You don't see that often!

WM: That's great, isn't it?

GE: Yeah!

PLAY: Well, I hope it is!

GE: We get one weekend early of playing [Gotham Knights] with y'all! ■

i **FORMAT** PS5, PS4
ETA OUT NOW
PUB HOYOVERSE
DEV HOYOVERSE
PLAYERS MULTI



With tens of millions of active players, live musical concerts, and huge, eye-catching booths at gaming events, it's almost strange to think that Genshin Impact's imminent anniversary is only its second. The huge, live-service open-world RPG already feels like a constant.

lost sibling after waking up in a strange world, players pick up the trail in Sumeru, under the rule of the Dendro Archon, who represents 'wisdom'. This new environment might be the most fantastical yet.

“Although Sumeru is a huge, connected landscape, it does not prevent the area from having a rich variety of landforms and ecological diversity,” say the team. It’s a place that feels wonderfully alive and full of variety, housing everything from spinocrocodyles (which you’re encouraged early on to photograph) chilling by the river to rainforests and gigantic, glowing mushroom colonies. It’ll be further expanded over time (next on the list to be added is the region’s vast

Even beyond new Dendro characters, Sumeru introduces plenty of fresh faces sure to become fan favourites



» desert, due to arrive not long after this mag hits shelves).

CHAIN REACTION

Simply bolting on additions and leaving things at that doesn't interest the developers. Sumeru is more than a basic expansion, fundamentally changing the way players interact with the open world.

"We advocate maintaining a high degree of interactivity in gameplay design, which is the most important feature of open worlds," say the team. "Player actions, even if they are subconscious or meaningless, should be able to have an effect on as many objects as possible. With that in mind, we've established a set of rules for Elemental Reactions, the alterable island forms that players have recently experienced, as well as new enemies with polymorphic transformation features."

Each of the game's heroes, who you mix and match to form four-person parties, is a master of one of Teyvat's seven elements – as are many of the enemies you face. More than simply applying weaknesses and resistances, these chain with one another to create special effects. This now applies to traversal techniques unique to Sumeru. Bouncy mushrooms shrivel up when burnt, for example, or become supercharged when shocked with electricity.

"Some enemies even change form entirely, such as living mushroom creatures who inhabit the spectacular vistas."

Some enemies even change forms entirely, such as living mushroom creatures who inhabit the spectacular, massive vistas, from huge rainforests to glowing fungus colonies. Sumeru, as the land of the element of Dendro, is built around the ideas of wisdom and life. Jumping off the fungal environments into creatures that can transform seemed like a logical step to the team. "We thought, 'Will there be some gifted

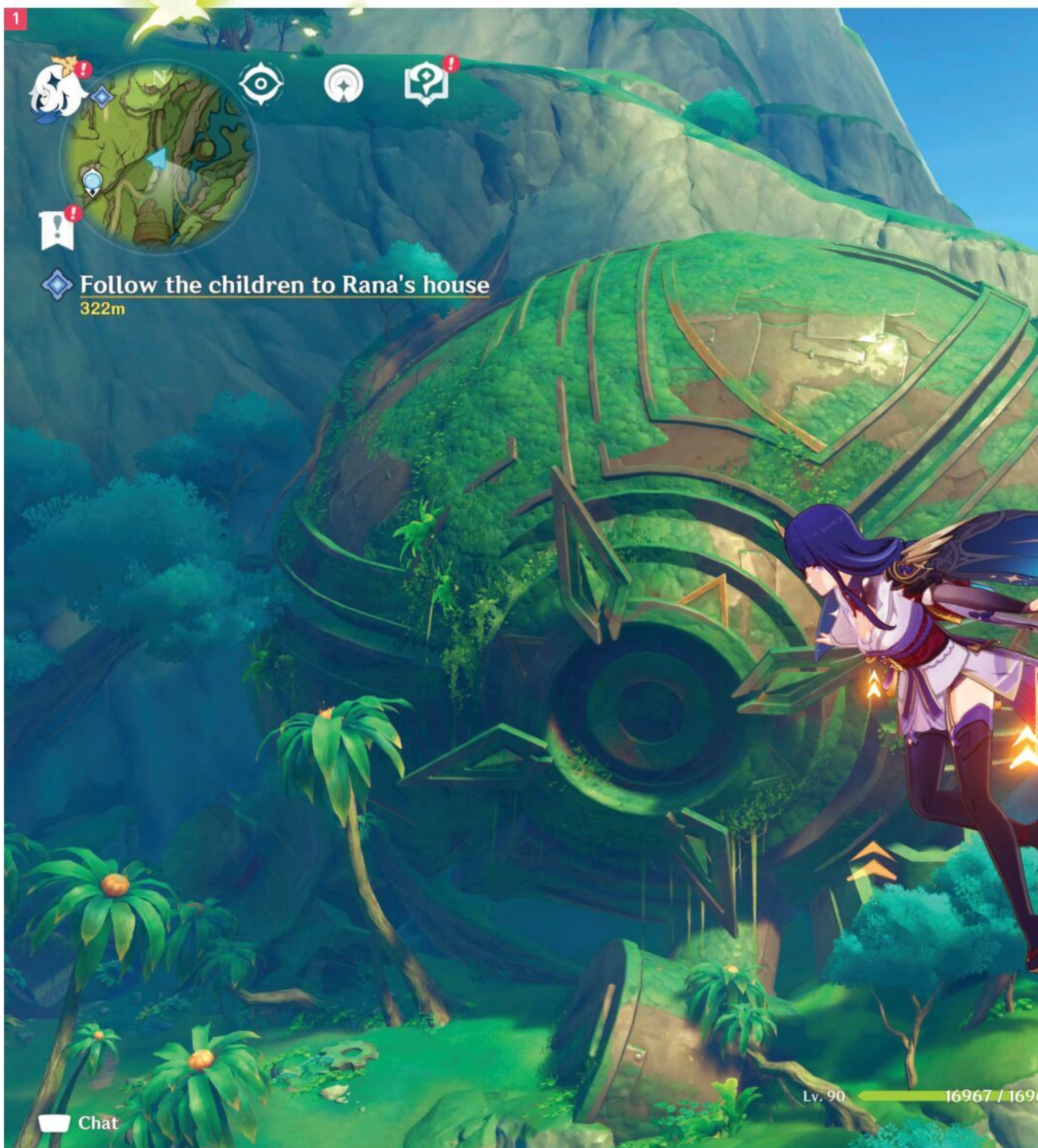
mushrooms in the land of Dendro that develop animal-like intelligence and behaviour to defend their homes and habitats?" they share. "Thus, this gave rise to mushrooms that can move, and fungi that evolved and developed an animal-like appearance and territorial awareness."

ELEMENT-TREE

Despite the elements being set in stone from the start of Genshin Impact, this new update is the first

time Dendro has been properly introduced, and characters with that element added to the roster. "Our design keywords for the Dendro element have actually remained the same, that is 'catalysis', 'wisdom', and 'life'," say the team. "However, the presentation of the specific gameplay has undergone a long period of refinement."

Beyond being a quirk of combat, the element has always been key to the whole region they've been constructing over the period. "[They're not] only reflected in the reaction system related to the Dendro





- 1 Sumeru takes scale to another level, and could very well be Genshin Impact's most impressive region to date.
- 2 Beyond the rainforests lie the desert, which is soon to be added to the constantly evolving open world.
- 3 You need to free chained machines before you're able to fight them.
- 4 The upcoming desert area features dynamic terrain deformation for advanced footprints, something made possible by the impressive tech inside PS5.

landed on new reactions Bloom and Catalyse to join Burn, allowing you to sprout additional damage, charge enemies with a damage potential that can spread, or simply set them alight.

PARK LIFE

Just as elements smash together for both good and ill, so do the people of Sumeru. Most of it centres on the 'young' Archon (a god, essentially) of the land who at only 500 has replaced a much older one. It's an evolution of a theme in Genshin's ongoing tale. "Be it Mondstadt, Liyue, or Inazuma, the relationship between gods and humans are changing," say the team.

"To some scholars loyal to the previous Dendro Archon, Greater Lord Rukkhadevata, the birth of Lesser Lord Kusanali represented the passing of the omniscient and omnipotent Greater Lord Rukkhadevata whom they had faithfully adored," they continue. Changes come in many forms, after all, and it's made Sumeru a unique region in Teyvat. "In addition, some scholars even developed doubts about the young Archon, resulting in the Sumeru Akademiya gradually assuming power and asserting itself as the administrator of Sumeru."

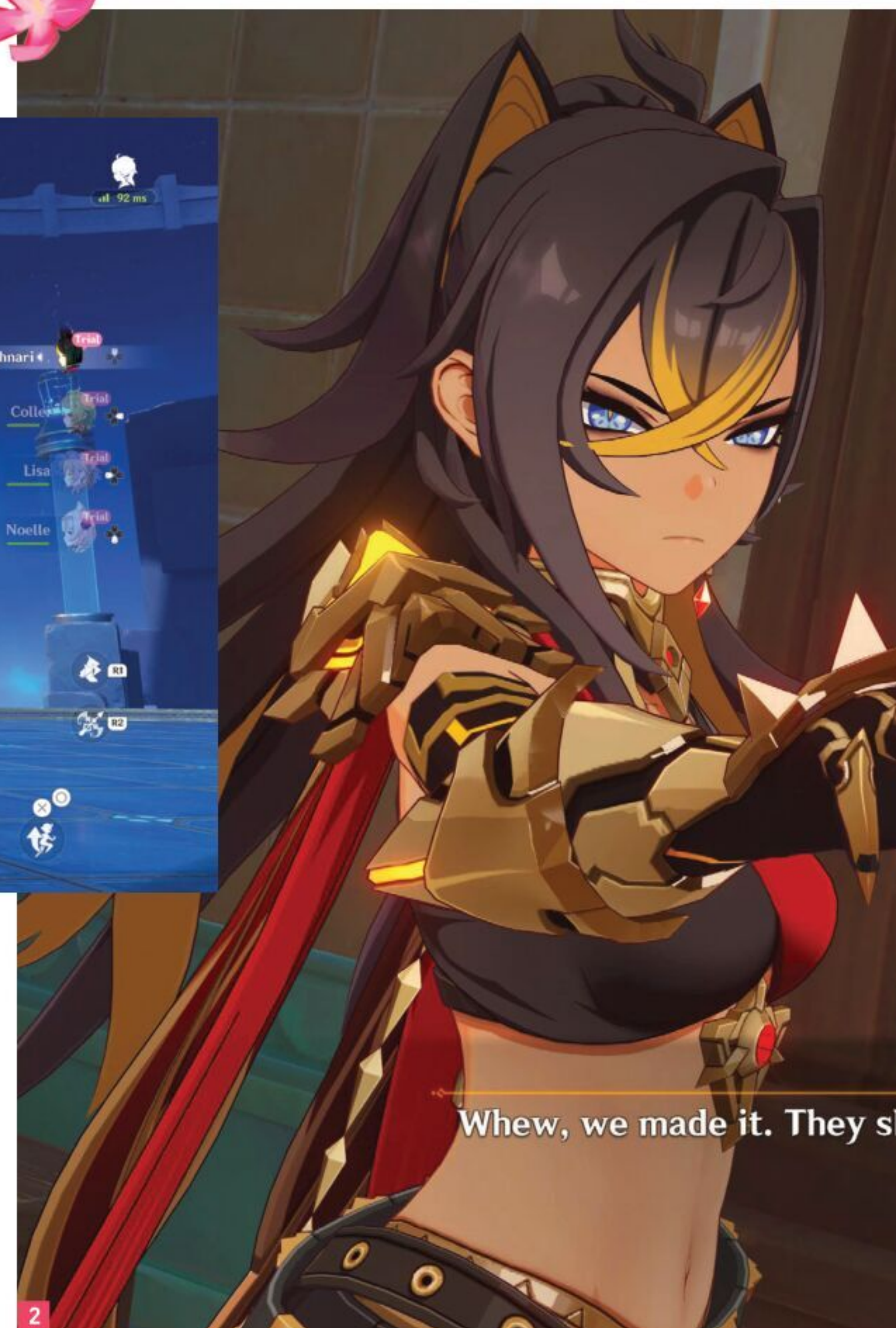
Meanwhile, some factions of The Eremites, who hail from the desert, have very different ideas about who should rule. "Unlike other factions we've seen before, the Eremites of the desert folk are not subordinate to any nation. They make a living as mercenaries and manoeuvre between different forces, and therefore can be friend or foe in different situations." Though, with that to be developed in



element," the team explain, "but also related to the environment mechanics, level design, and even the historical setting of Sumeru."

Dendro's core ideas might sound simple, but adding them to a complete set of elemental reactions

and doing so in a way that's intuitive is another story. "We proposed many different design solutions during this process. However, many of them were scrapped for reasons such as convoluted rules and defying common sense," the team say. Ultimately, they



the weeks and months to come, the team only hint at what that might ultimately come to mean.

It's an in-depth narrative, then, which might surprise those who have only peered over friends' shoulders to see plenty of gliding and cracking open treasure chests. But narrative is key to almost every corner of the land the devs build. "Many stories have taken place on the continent of Teyvat, and many characters, landscapes, and books speak of the impact of the stories on the continent," they tell us. "We don't expect players to go through all

1 New five-star hero Tighnari specialises in dealing high damage with precise arrow shots. **2** Eremitic mercenary Dehya packs quite a punch. Formed of many different groups, will she end up as friend or foe?

these details, but we hope they can perceive what happened in the past through the little nuggets of information they encounter everywhere. This is another way of telling the story."

EVENT FULL

Away from the lush land of Sumeru, there's still plenty of change throughout the world of Genshin Impact. "We want players to witness the world of Teyvat and the changes of each character in more ways than one," the team share when talking about how limited-time events can take us back to past regions.

We ask if we can expect reruns of some of these – boasting full storylines and unique mechanics, they're a shame to wave goodbye to. "There are some events that we will

consider rerunning at the right time," they say. But dedication to change, and time meaningfully pressing forward still play on their minds, meaning the events might not be quite the same if they decide to repeat them. "Because our story is constantly evolving, many events, even if they appear again, the people, stories, and gameplay involved will change accordingly," they clarify.

The team are aware of the allure of the new, and are dedicated to trying to ease the journey through the content for players just starting out: "We have added a 'Quick Start' button

Well travelled

From major updates to smaller expeditions, where we've been so far



Mondstadt

Large windmills poke out of this wind-worshipping European-inspired city, which is where you first awaken in the beautiful world of Teyvat, and begin the search for your missing sibling.



Liyue

A harbour bustling with trade, which you arrive at in the middle of turmoil as their Archon god has apparently been killed. Is it the divine or the human that should lead the historic city forward?



Dragonspine

The first map expansion added a towering snowy mountain between Mondstadt and Liyue, harbouring ancient secrets. It's a harsh environment; you have to use fire to stave off the HP-draining cold.



Golden Apple Archipelago

These islands appear to harbour various events. This summer, these included landforms whose geography could be altered to allow you to solve exploration puzzles.



Dunyarzad

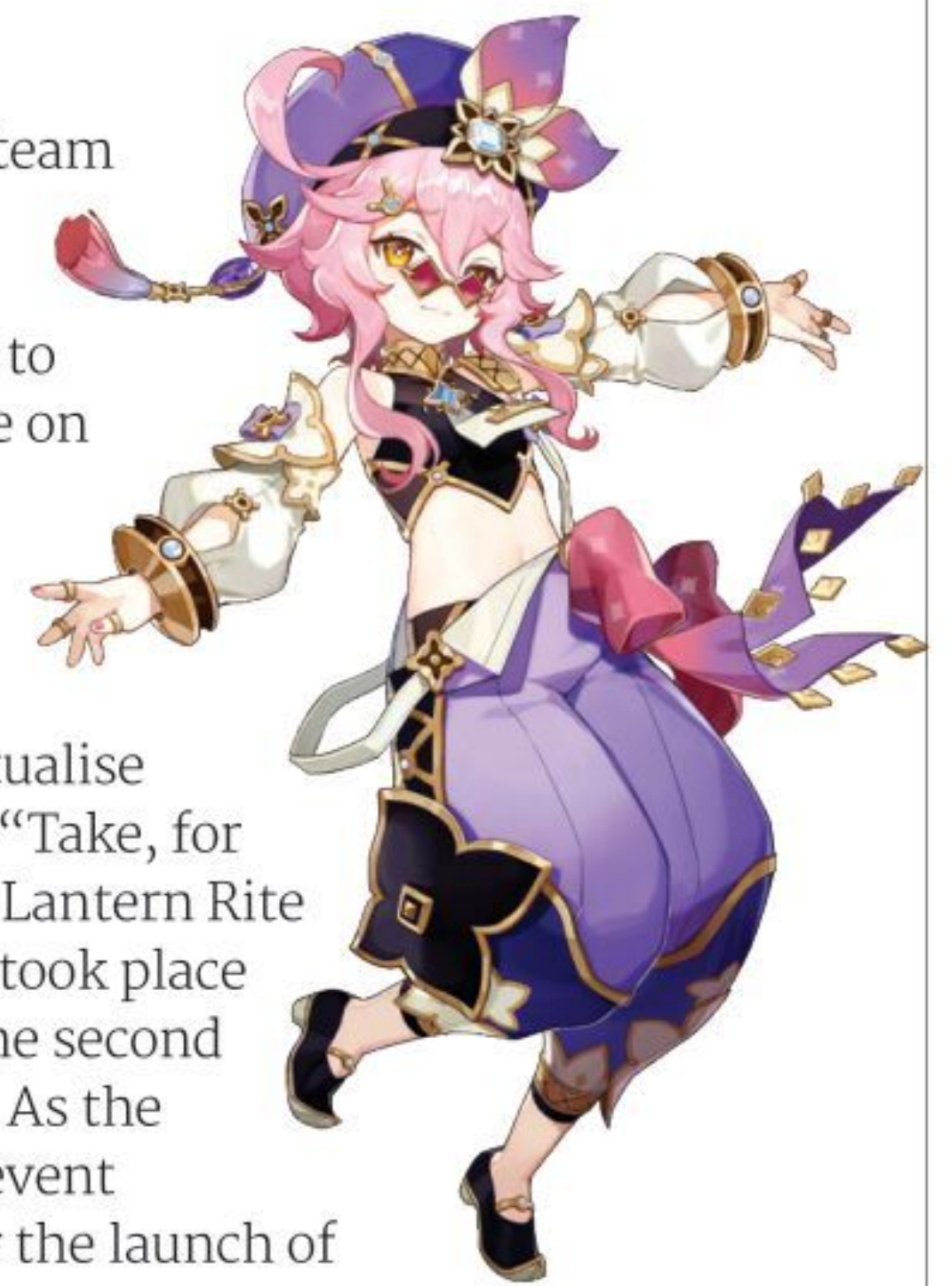
ouldn't be able to find us now... Wait, stand down! Dehya!

Start Auto-Play Confirm

stories,” the team promise.

The commitment to keeping those on the table and building on them at the same time can recontextualise content, too. “Take, for example, the Lantern Rite event, which took place in Liyue for the second year in a row. As the first festival event released after the launch of Genshin Impact, after entering Teyvat, experiencing a major battle in the main quest of Liyue, and witnessing the departure of Rex Lapis, players joined in a grand celebration with the locals according to tradition, releasing thousands of Xiao lanterns that held hope and remembrance,” they explain.

“By the time of the next Lantern Rite, Liyue had stepped into an age of humanity, where Travelers not only



to some event interfaces so that players can experience the game more easily without having to rush through some of the prerequisite quests,” they note. This joins a number of recent quality-of-life updates, such as the option to trade in three unwanted artefact drops for one from a specific, if older, set.

NEW HORIZONS

Yet the developers are dedicated to keeping everywhere we’ve already visited very much part of the conversation. “There is still a great deal of history buried in these ancient

“Through the introduction of new events, gameplay, and areas, we hope players will gain more insight into [...] those areas.”

regions, and the lives of people in these areas are also constantly moving forward with the passage of time,” they say. Whether it’s seasonal events or new character stories, there’s a lot more to dig into. “Players will meet old friends and new acquaintances in areas they have already visited. All of these will culminate into fresh and novel

met new companions Shenhe and Yun Jin, but also helped rebuild one of the iconic buildings of Liyue, the Jade Chamber, which was damaged in the first Lantern Rite battle. Through the subsequent introduction of new events, gameplay, and areas, we hope players will gain more insight into the past, present, and future of these areas.” It draws players across the



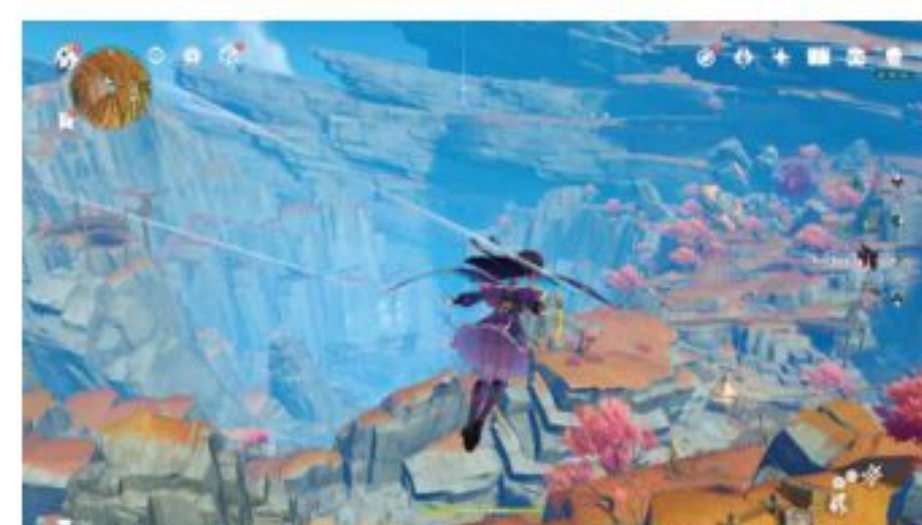
Inazuma

Crossing the sea, you arrive at this recently isolated clutch of islands. Their ruler seeks eternity, and to control the Visions that bestow elemental powers upon users by forcibly confiscating them.



Enkanomiya

Ruins of an ancient civilisation now buried in a strange cavern beneath the sea. While in Enkanomiya you’re able to switch from Whitenight to Evernight to alter the environment’s properties.



The Chasm

Between Liyue and Sumeru lies The Chasm, a region deeply scarred by a terrifying battle long ago. You can navigate its twisting tunnels using Lumenstone to stave off dark corruption.



Sumeru

Home to both lush forests and harsh deserts of huge scale (so far, we’ve mainly seen the former). This Dendro culture values ‘wisdom’, though there’s plenty of conflict around what that exactly means.



1 Our tip for dealing with too much greenery? Burn it all down! Burn!! **2** Wearable Akasha Terminals connect you to an archive of information. It'd be bad if pumping in dodgy info corrupted anything... **3** Strange visions are part and parcel of being the Traveler, but will they finally lead to a proper reunion with your long lost-sibling? **4** Collei's a budding forest ranger – literally! Shoot these to release four-leaf sigil grapple points... **5** ...which you can grapple to using **RT** + **○**, helping you explore Sumeru's huge verticality with ease.

» world directly into that ongoing story as they undergo their own adventure.

POWER UP

Technology has changed too. Genshin Impact is still a young game, but it was released before PS5. It didn't take long for the new-gen console to get a native version, however, and the game's as much a treat to play as PS5 was, from the sounds of it, to develop for. "Powerful platforms like PS5 can help us to enhance the immersion of players in more ways than one, both in terms of hardware and technology," say the team, citing 4K image quality and SSD fast-loading as examples.

Haptics are something the team have continued to build on. "Our



"Powerful platforms like PS5 can help us to enhance the immersion of players [...] both in terms of hardware and technology."

team members are always very curious and eager to learn about new technologies and what those might enable in the future," they say. The next update will add these to characters' elemental bursts (essentially, their ultimate moves).

Coloured shadows are also arriving on PS5. "We have been improving shadow effects in Genshin Impact from the perspective of enhancing realism," say the team, though the 'coloured' part has an additional function. "After establishing a certain sense of realism, we felt it was time to further experiment with more artistic and stylised expressions to further highlight the unique sense of fantasy in the world." The inspiration

comes from animation the team has enjoyed, after noticing how the effect can create "remarkable artistic beauty and [a] dreamlike atmosphere".

The forthcoming 3.1 update promises some of the team's most ambitious use of PS5 to date: "dynamic terrain deformation" that can alter the environment around you. "We made a relatively basic attempt in the early days, whereby when players walked around the snowy terrain in Dragonspine, footprints of a fixed shape will be left behind," they say. When it comes to the

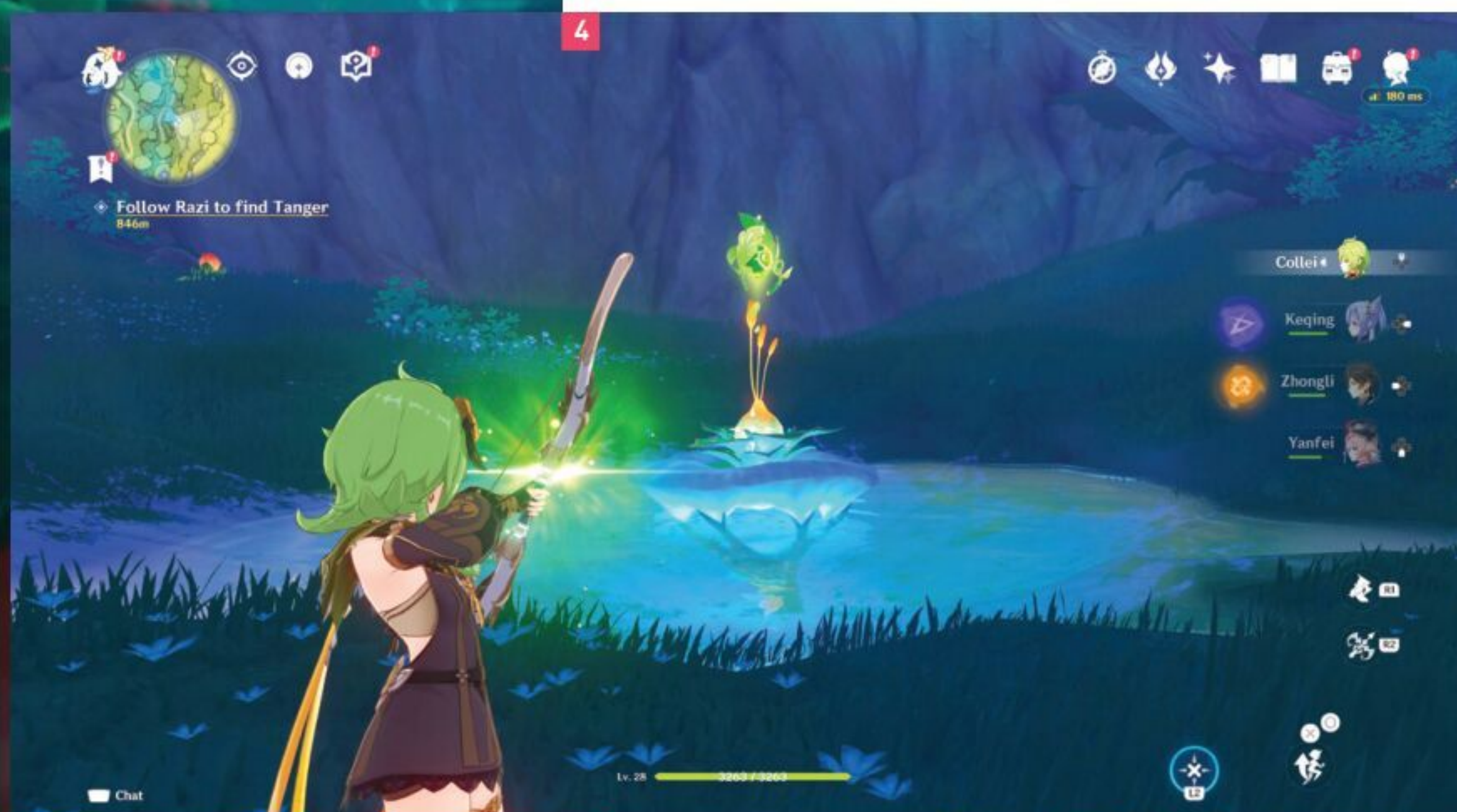
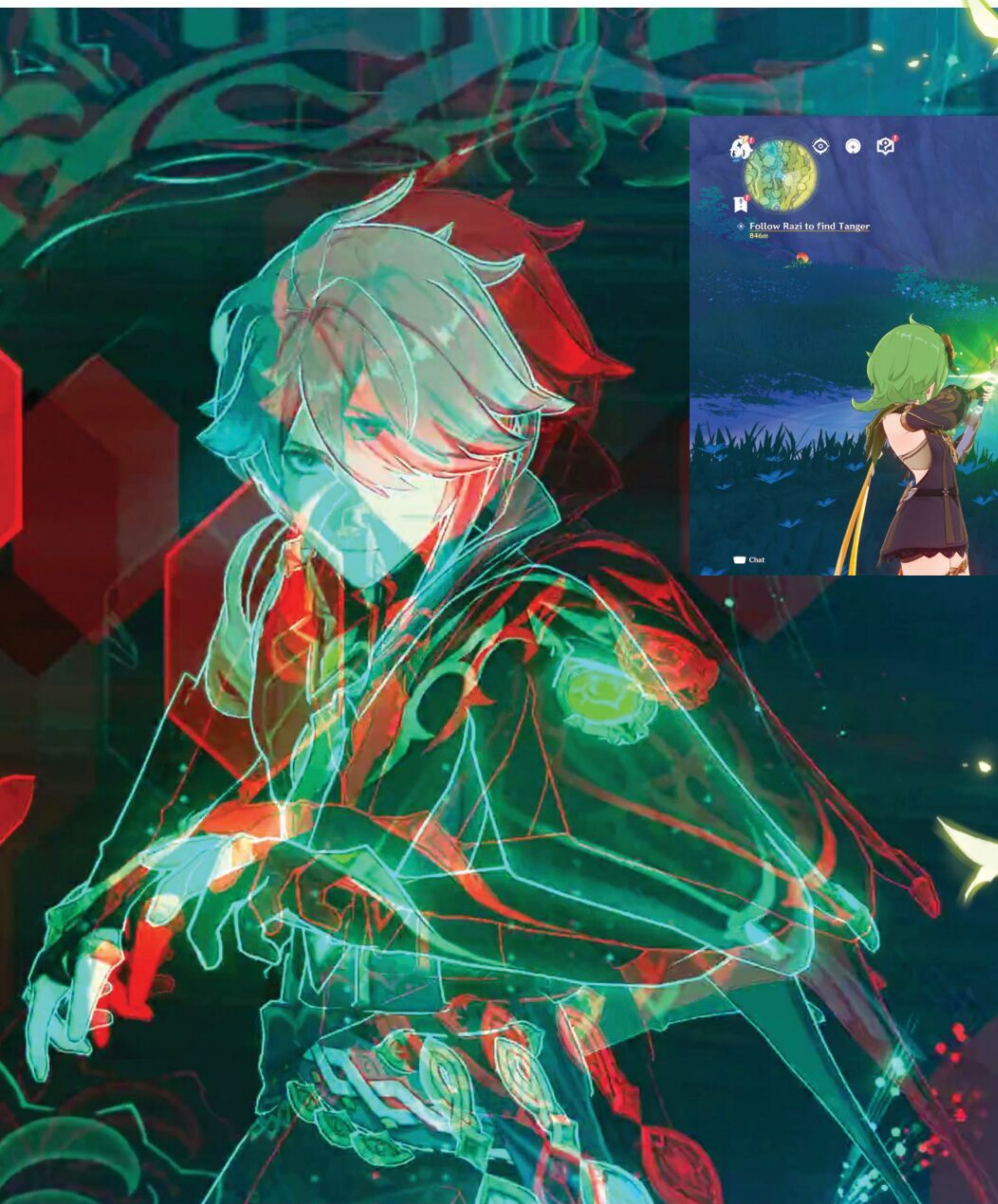
upcoming desert area, they're taking this to a new level. "We decided to add real-time calculations to the footprints to show a more realistic physical feedback: when characters and enemies step on the desert, the

sand under their feet will sink, while part of the sand will gather around the footprints."

Each way you interact with the sand – walking, running, sprinting, or jumping – will have a different effect. The team are proud of this, and it requires serious processing power to pull off. "Thanks to certain unique hardware features of the PlayStation consoles, we were able to optimise and implement this solution efficiently."

Change, then, comes in all shapes: mechanical





innovation that makes Genshin Impact's open world more joyous to explore than ever; a story that continues to evolve; and technology that just keeps getting better. One thing that doesn't change is the team's commitment to improving the game.

SAME BUT DIFFERENT

As Genshin Impact keeps growing, it might get more intimidating for newcomers (though we can help – flip the page for some tips!). “This is an issue we are considering as well. While we continue to produce more exciting content, we are also trying to ease the burden of returning players or new players,” say the team. “In addition to the ongoing system optimisations and beginner tutorial adjustments, client capacity optimisation, and intelligent management of past content are also under development.”

So far efforts to reduce grindier aspects and introduce players to new events have been a success. Changes are made with careful consideration to try to ensure all players can enjoy things. “For each player, the world of Teyvat and the experience of being in it are unique to you, and you can decide your own pace,” say the Genshin Impact development team. “No matter when you join or when you return, in Teyvat, the stars in the sky will always have a place for you.” ■



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Reviews



"WATCH YOUR
DELIGHTFUL
ARMY OF 'MON.'"

64 Digimon Survive

60 The Last Of Us Part I

Will improved graphics
recapture the magic?



HIGHLIGHTS

SAINTS ROW 66 | TWO POINT CAMPUS 67 | SOUL HACKERS 2 68 | KLONOA PHANTASY REVERIE SERIES 69
FOBIA - ST. DINFNA HOTEL 69 | DISGAEA 6 69 | SWORD AND FAIRY: TOGETHER FOREVER 70 | CULT OF THE LAMB 71
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Despite the retroactive 'Part I' title, Joel and Ellie's journey is a complete and rather good narrative.

The Last Of Us Part I

Part and parcel



INFO

FORMAT PS5

ETA Out now

PUB Sony

DEV Naughty Dog

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 8-10 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Customisable subtitles and HUD; visual sound indicators; gore and infinite breathe toggles; adjustable motion blur, camera shake, and film grain; screen reader (inc cinematic descriptions), remappable controls; hold/tap button toggles; screen magnifier; colourblind mode; skip puzzle option; navigation and combat assists; difficulty modes

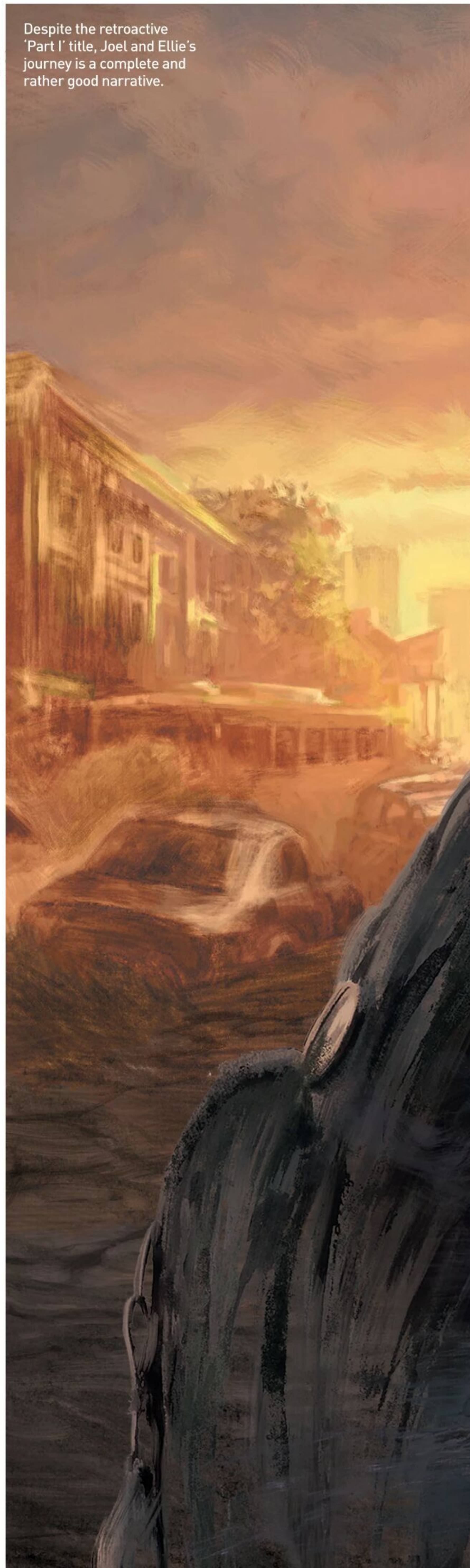
The cordyceps fungus that's turned most of the world into zombified 'Infected' grows more powerful over time, the oldest enemies the beefiest. Does the same hold true for this PS5 outing? This remake of the 2013 PS3 original is designed to be of a piece with that game's recent sequel. The result may be one of the new console's greatest graphical showpieces, but as little has changed much, the similarity in feel to Part II can result in unfavourable comparisons.

Don't get us wrong, it's not *bad*. Plenty here is different, but mostly in order to make the first game fit more seamlessly alongside the second. That does result in the kind of graphical fidelity that can make you gasp: incredibly lush foliage wrapping around the overgrown, post-apocalyptic cities; the soft rippling of water; and incredibly emotive faces. It does also, at times, mean a grittier, more realistic colour palette than the quite pretty one you can find in the original game and its PS4 remaster (which runs excellently on PS5 already via backwards compatibility).

FACE OFF

The new facial animations might look fantastic compared to the originals but, as Naughty Dog has stated, it's all based on the pre-existing motion capture. It's a metaphor for Part I in some ways. This might be a remake, but it's one carefully stitched over the skeleton of the whole game. We replayed the previous Remastered alongside this, and every room is still essentially the same, as is every encounter. Your memories will be well served, though aside from gawking at the graphics you'll feel like you've been here, done that.

Which is a shame, as mechanically there are quite a few differences to how the game controls, taking cues from Part II. But not every feature from Ellie's gruelling revenge thriller makes its way into this enhanced version, and despite the bells and whistles Part I can feel lesser as a result. Even with those tweaks, it's constantly being





■ This might be a remake, but it's slavishly faithful to the structure of the original game. ■



1
2



1 Infected twitch weirdly and there's only so much ammo, so pick your shots wisely. 2 Like in Part II, the crafting benches have some great, immersive animations. 3 Special Infected like Bloaters are few and far between, but effectively used.

contorted into the shape of the original. You know there's a difference in what you're playing, but the effect is mostly the same.

If anything, Remastered on PS4 offers a snappier experience, unburdened by an overabundance of realistic animations. While we love watching Joel join Ellie in being able to tinker with and disassemble his firearms at workbenches, we miss the way arrows for his bow didn't have to be laboriously placed in his backpack in real time, and his gliding crouch walk (now a duck-like waddle).

LAST CALL

That doesn't mean nothing is additive, but it does make playing Part I more a matter of personal preference than something essential. Part I's fidelity definitely enhances some of the spookier sequences – sections where the hard-to-spot Stalkers peer around corners at you and scuttle behind cover are more terrifying than ever.

The new human AI, meanwhile, makes it easier to play around with people and regain cover. This was possible in the original, but felt clunkier. The encounter design, though, rarely makes use of it,

and you can't go prone or hide in tall grass like you can in Part II – another way this game is close enough to the sequel to feel inferior by comparison.

Even with the improvements it's hard to say enemies are all that smart this time around. Groups may bark orders to one another about where they've spotted you taking refuge, but lack the terrifying co-ordination of Part II's WLF and Seraphites.

Melee is another area that suffers. The more realistic, fluid animation almost makes you feel like you're playing Part II, before you realise it lacks that game's desperate dodging and weaving and you get bashed on the nose instead.

You can't help but be aware of the original game's skeleton. Some of that game design feels dated now, sparkled up as it may be, and you'll sigh when you carry yet another plank of wood to a small gap or trundle a bin along. Sometimes there are odd moments of stillness when character animations

haven't quite lined up right, or the button to interact with an object doesn't appear until you've jogged around on the spot for a moment (or restarted the checkpoint).

MUSHROOM PICKING

Are we being picky? Definitely. But that's the position Part I puts you in. If you're familiar with The Last Of Us, you've seen this before, and if you're a new fan you'll play a gorgeous game with mechanical design that feels just slightly out of step with how modern it looks.

It's a shame as The Last Of Us Part I is very good. That's because The Last Of Us is, unchangeably, *extremely* good. We had a blast playing through The Last Of Us Part I for the first time, and we also had a blast replaying The Last Of Us Remastered. As far as 'zombie' stories go, TLOU remains a corker. Set 20 years after the 'shrooms hit the fan, it creates a 'returned to nature' world that leaves you itching to explore, and

The more realistic, fluid animation almost makes you feel like you're playing Part II.



4 Your only ranged stealth weapon is the bow and arrow. Be a silent killer. **5** Iconic moments like the encounter with the giraffe are present and correct. **6** The water looks so good we want to dive in, mucky as it is.



the character work on Joel and Ellie is phenomenal. You feel the journey both characters go on in your heart, and the subtle ways they grow closer as he struggles to smuggle her cross-country in the hopes that her unique immunity to the fungus will create a cure for humanity. The Left Behind DLC is also included, diving into Ellie's history even further (which makes an excellent bridge to her more complete adventure many years later in the sequel).

Blissfully, this isn't a story afraid to use cuts (like an actual movie – shocker), effective jumps in time conveying plenty behind the scenes. We'd argue that this focus, centring on key moments in Joel and Ellie's journey across multiple locations, gives it a tighter structure than Part II (which

while fantastic, could feel bloated in the way it told its tale).

Even so, this isn't a review of The Last Of Us. That game is great, and you probably didn't need us to tell you that. This is a review of The Last Of Us Part I. As much as we love the skeleton, the way it's been built upon here feels like a missed opportunity. The chance to incorporate Part II's stellar gameplay evolutions into the original heart-wrenching story was there; had Naughty Dog taken it, it could have been a game-changer. Instead, this feels like an obligatory reshoot. Yes, it's visually stunning (one of PS5's best), and yes, things have been changed. But the end result? Too familiar. Neat extras are here, like a speedrun mode, behind the scenes videos, and commentary tracks – but we'd hoped for something bolder.

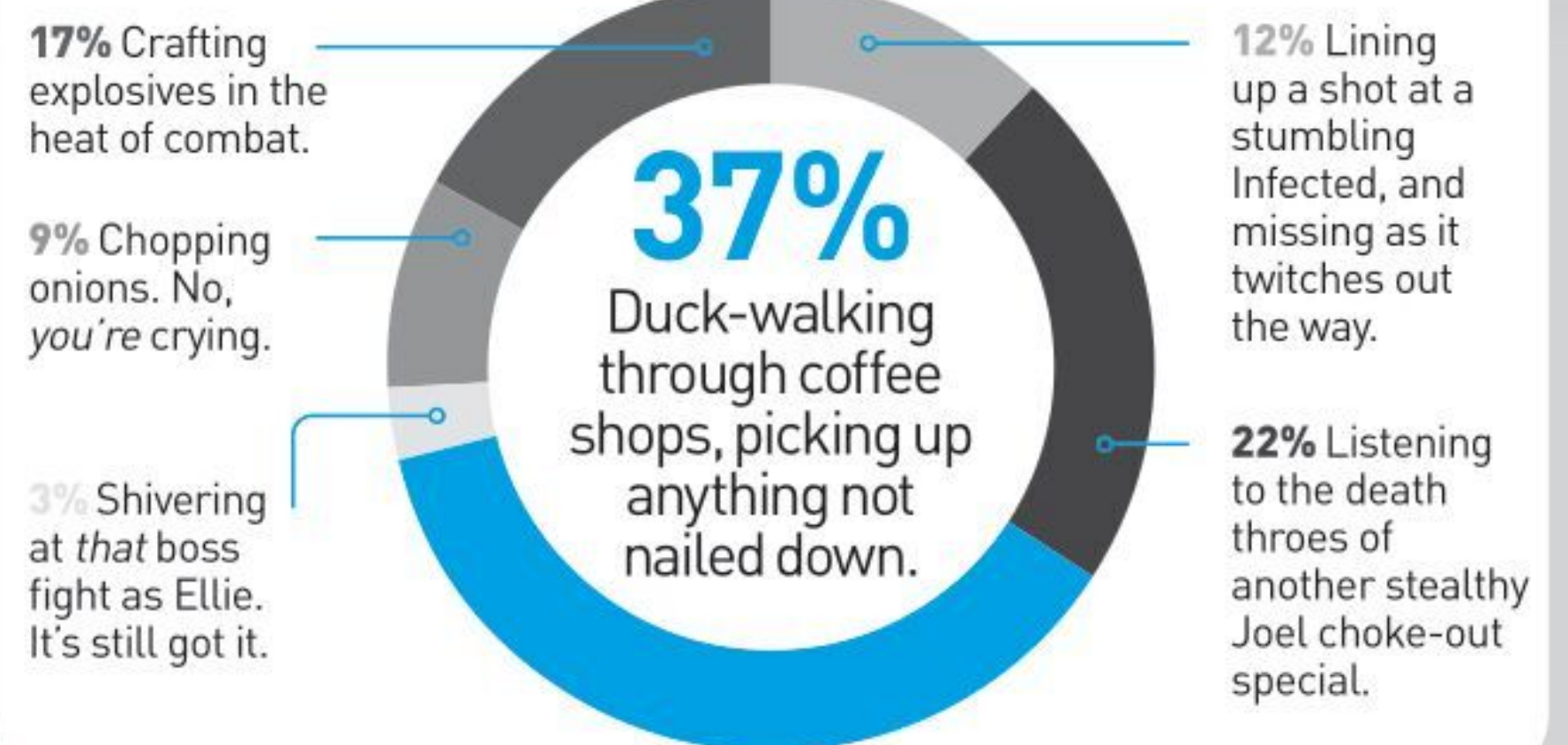


Graphically jaw-dropping, yet gameplay tweaks feel too coy to make an impact. TLOU is, as ever, great, but this version is neither a must-buy nor must-play. Oscar Taylor-Kent



THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: THE LAST OF US PART I



THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

HAPTIC FEEDBACK

It's used a bit for things like pattering rain or distant thunder, but not as effectively as in Returnal.



ADAPTIVE TRIGGERS

Best felt when using the bow, big weapons produce some resistance that add punch to a firefight.

ALSO ON PLAYSTATION 4



Well, not strictly; Part I is for PS5 alone. However, The Last Of Us Remastered is available on older hardware. You'll notice a lower polygon count and stiffer models, but it still looks great. With less realistic animations it's 'gamier', meaning snappy gunfights, if less immersion.

LOVING/HATING



PRETTY PICTURE

It's gorgeous. Fidelity mode targets 4K/40fps; Performance targets Dynamic 4K or 1440p at 60fps. We recommend the former.



SNAKES & LADDERS

The game design still feels a bit 2013. Get ready to push plenty of blocks around, and boost Ellie up tall ledges to help you clamber up.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE

The collectible pendants are hidden all over, but find the first one for this.



SILVER

Power up by finding all of the training manuals. You need those skills!



GOLD

Let Ellie tell you all of her awful jokes. Kids have the worst sense of humour...



The old man doesn't evolve, sadly.

Digimon Survive

Surviving but not thriving

Let's be clear: Digimon Survive is exactly what it says on the tin. But in the same way that buying the same type of soup from two different shops can leave you with one that's rich and creamy and one that's mostly just unsatisfying water, something being what it says on the tin is not alone enough to inspire confidence.

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Digimon anime, Survive has more in common with early anime iterations of Digimon than some of the more recent games such as Digimon Story. As such, it steps away from what's familiar in Digimon games, instead branching out into the world of strategy RPGs, while incorporating a visual novel aspect that ensure your choices determine where the game goes.

The SRPG and visual novel elements work well together, and are balanced nicely, with neither aspect being more prominent than the other. However, while the monster battles are frequent enough to make them a legitimate part of the game, they are a little bit boring.

The visual novel aspects include exploring and poking around environments, but are mostly used for building character Affinity and snagging useful items. They do break up the long conversations and allow you to prioritise getting to know particular characters, which can ultimately lead



INFO

FORMAT PS4

ETA Out now

PUB Bandai
Namco
Entertainment

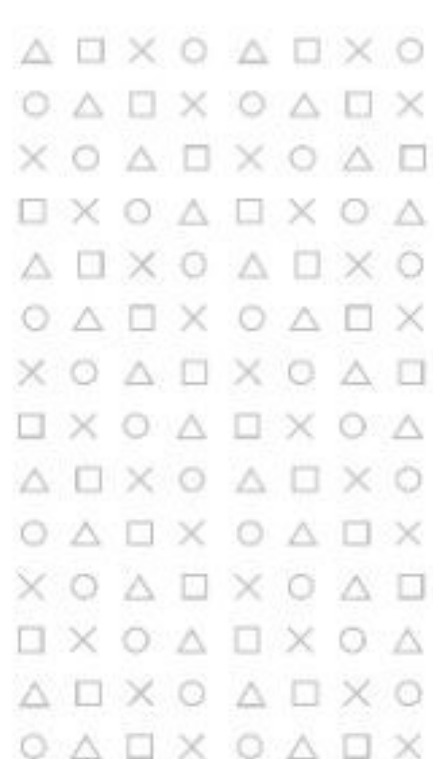
DEV Hyde

PLAYERS 1-4

LENGTH 30+ hours

ACCESSIBILITY

Text speed options;
vibration options;
expanded volume
controls



to useful monster evolutions down the line.

Developer Hyde doesn't skimp on the choices you're offered, and most of the decisions you make will mean choosing between the Moral, Wrathfulness, and Harmony paths, depending on how you respond to characters and throw together desperate plans of action as the world falls apart around you. It's easy to wonder just how things might go differently if your Affinity with particular characters or towards one of the three traits were a little higher or lower, and there's a great temptation to replay on New Game+ when you're finished to see how different choices affect the way things play out. That branching

Agumon evolution tree isn't going to unlock itself.

DIGI-SEE THAT?

Most attempts to bolster the combat side of things end up slowing the game down even more, as you comb through rooms for bizarre items you can use to boost a few stats and watch your delightful army of 'mon jump from level to level across the terrain at a painstakingly slow pace (even on fast forward). The roster of available Digimon is small, though it does harbour many nostalgic inclusions that breathe fond familiarity into your monster recruiting. It will be interesting to see if there's any DLC planned for Survive that might expand the recruitable

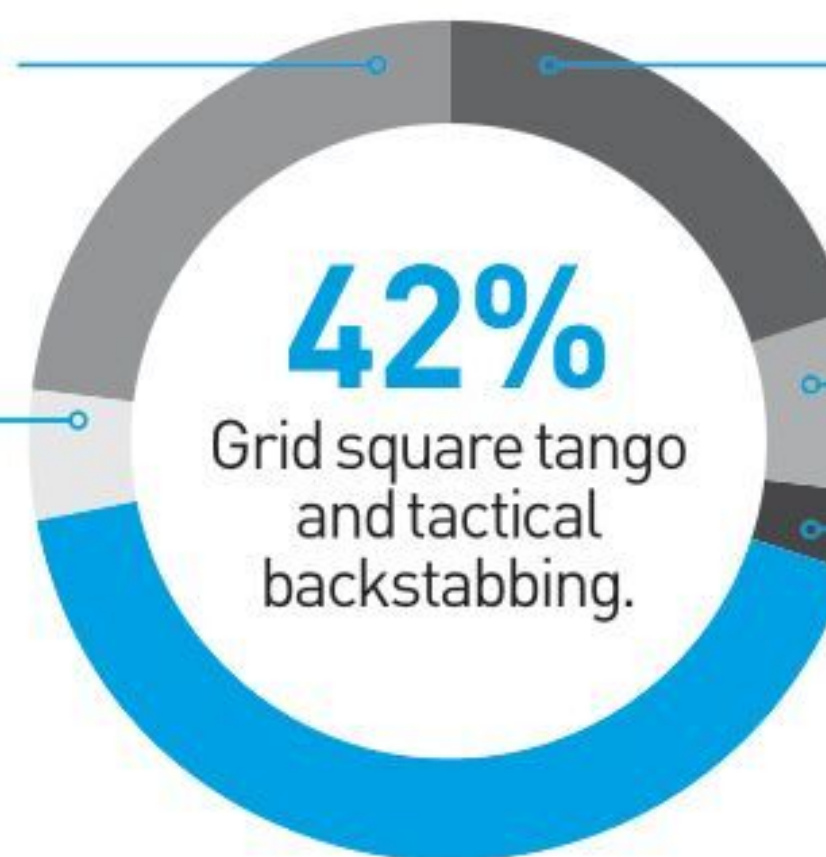
It steps away from what's familiar in Digimon games in favour of branching out.

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: DIGIMON SURVIVE

23% Hunting your surroundings for glitches using your phone's camera.

5% Harvesting Enlightenment slabs for mooree Champion and higher possibilities.



20% Using Giga Destroyer, and yelling it out loud.

7% Begging Digimon to be your friend in Free Battle, with limited success.

3% Mourning dead teammates.

HOW TO... RECRUIT ARUKENIMON



Arukenimon can be the Ultimate evolution of Fangmon, Sangloupmon, or Wendigomon. All of those evolve from Gazimons, which are plentiful in free battle. If that's too much work for you, then you can find an already-evolved Arukenimon in free battle and ask *reaaaally* nicely.

FRIENDS & ENEMIES



AOI

The mum friend, Aoi's kindness makes her a valuable asset both on and off the battlefield.



SHUUJI

A sensible leader, but cruel to his Digimon partner, which we're none too keen on.



KAITO

His sister is his focus. You'll butt heads with him if you prioritise anything else.

LOVING/HATING



POWERFUL PALS

There's a genuine thrill when you're able to bring an Ultimate to a Champion fight by evolving recruited monsters.



SLOW-MOTION STRATEGY

As the Crowmon flies doesn't make traversing these large, lacklustre maps any quicker or more interesting.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE

Get a nice alliterative bronze trophy for each boss you defeat. You're a winner!



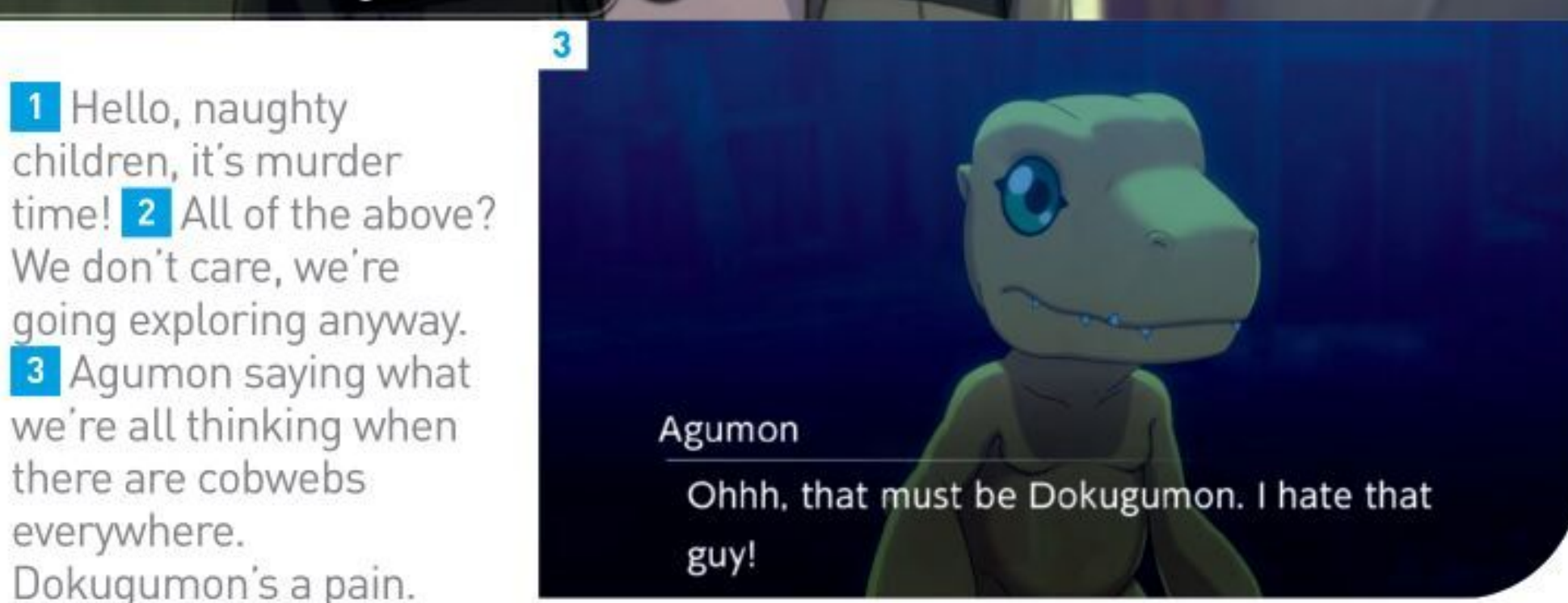
SILVER

Nothing says 'final boss' like a trophy name straight up telling you so.



GOLD

Ever seen a Digimon evolution tree? Encountering all the monsters will be nuts.



to include absent fan favourites like Wizardmon or Wormmon.

Similarly, the monster recruitment aspect is half-hearted. The free battles are formulaic and repetitive, and the Digimon you get from them probably won't make it into your team if you're giving the story characters the attention they would like. Still, it's fun to see old favourites like Angemon show up in a way befitting an anniversary title, and free battle does allow you to take power back into your hands if your lack of Affinity with one of your classmates has left their Digimon partner limited forever to the level of Champion.

ROOKIE MISTAKES

The story is very slow-paced. Though there are some

genuinely exciting and brutal moments, the substance is stretched thin over a long period of time and a somewhat clunky framework. Visually the game excels, though, with the visual novel sections boasting crisp, clear visuals, and the use of Live2D on character sprites adding a sense of movement that makes these story sections easily feel like watching an anime – if it took a whole episode's worth of time to come to any sense of decision.

Digimon Survive succeeds in utilising the nostalgia that undoubtedly led to its development, and those nostalgic moments are clear highlights for existing fans in an otherwise low-key experience that plays for higher stakes than it itself can match.

While Digimon Survive is an underwhelming Rookie in the SRPG genre, if the developers continue to evolve the series, a future title could become a Champion. Max Williams

6

PLAY



Saints Row

A step forward, but the fun weirdness is gone



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

ETA Out now

PUB Deep Silver

DEV Volition

PLAYERS 1-2

LENGTH 10-30 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Closed captioning;
extensive mission
difficulty settings

[illegible]

Saints Row has an identity crisis. After going super weird with Saints Row 4 and its spin-off follow-up, Gat Out of Hell, Volition Games gave the series a rest while it worked on the stopgap superhero adventure Agents of Mayhem. This 2022 reboot of its beloved open world crime series is a serviceable and often enjoyable game, but it's also... not very exciting.

Saints Row got so weird back in 2013 that it was basically Crackdown, except heaps better. You could run faster than cars, leap higher than planes, and the sense of gleeful liberation was intoxicating. It's one of the most fun and bizarre open world action games you'll play, which makes this more grounded reboot feel like *Barry Lyndon* by comparison.

It's a kind of rags to riches tale: you're the leader of the Saints, and after a prologue that sees the gang reigning over the city, time shifts backwards and we're at square one. Saints Row traces the gradual ascent of the playable boss character (who can be customised with a typically extensive character creator) and their three charismatic sidekicks. The story unfolds slowly but it's engaging, both the characters and their quips.

CHARACTER ACTION

What is less engaging is, well, everything else. The city of Santo Ileso stays true to its Nevada inspiration, but that results in a remarkably flat and weirdly underpopulated stretch of sandy countryside interspersed with low-rise suburbs and a village-

sized CBD. Still, it can be genuinely moody at times, and the Las Vegas-themed neighbourhood in particular really shines at night. It's just a shame that Saints Row isn't a particularly good looking game: on PS5 in performance mode, a muddy patina lays over the distance during the daytime.

nearby enemy before tossing them into their buddies. Physics are deliberately loose, which results in some brilliant and terrifying rag doll effects, which come amusingly into play during the otherwise fairly rigid driving.

Saints Row does everything sufficiently, it just doesn't really even try to reach for greatness. Its

📌 Saints Row does everything sufficiently, it just doesn't really even try to reach for greatness. 🗨️

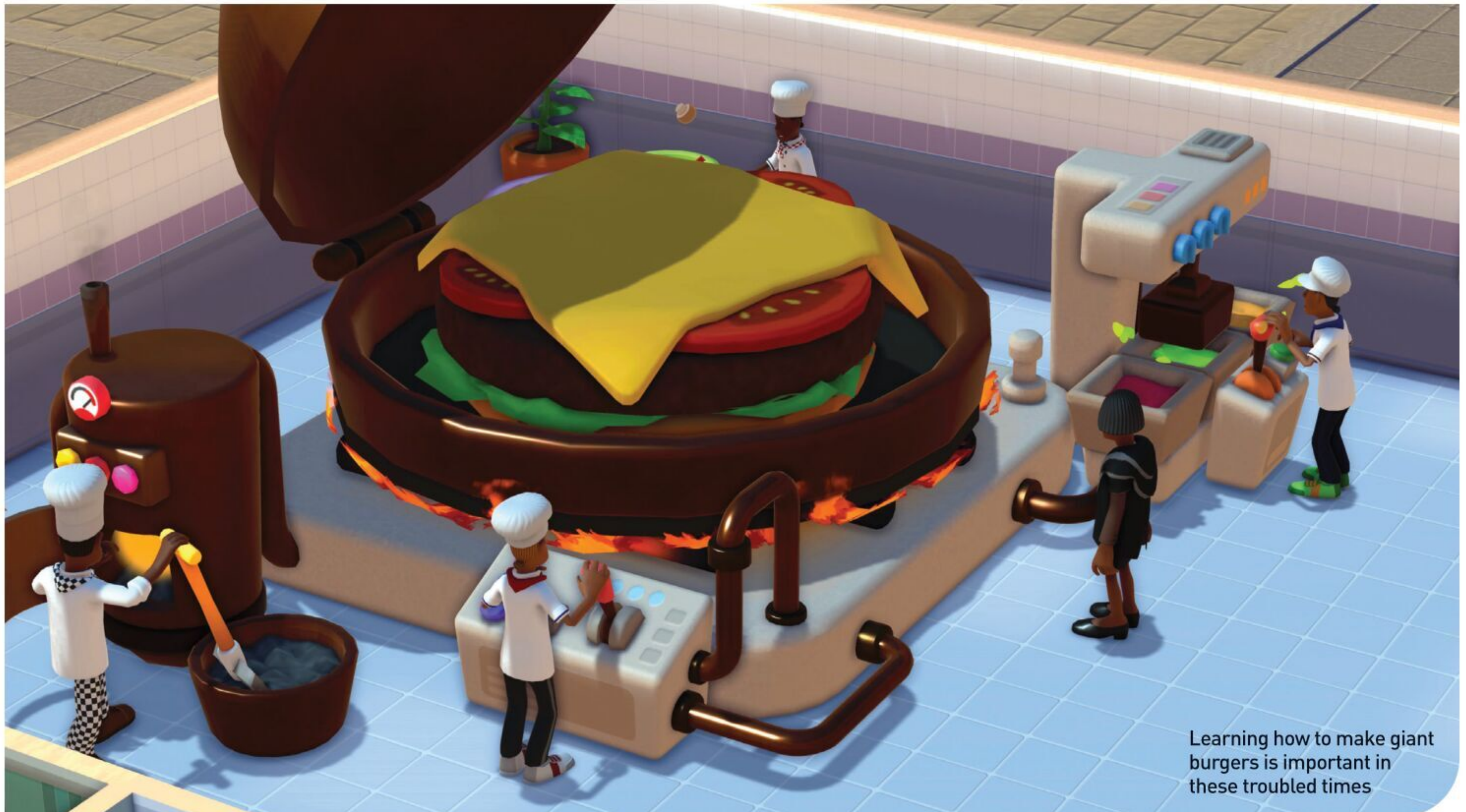
Combat is a saving grace. It's not complex, but it's powerful and fun, playing more like a first-person shooter than a third-person cover shooter (much like earlier Saints games, then). Special abilities are gradually unlocked and some of them are hilarious to use, such as the one that lets you plant a grenade on a

irreverent narrative is okay, but its approach to satire, and its general chattiness, has a tone that rings as an inferior brand of GTA. Which, well (block your ears Saints fanatics), that's kinda what the series has always been. But before this reboot Saints Row was starting to become something uniquely its own, which has since been lost.



Saints Row is an overly pragmatic reboot which will hopefully develop into something more distinctive with its inevitable sequel. Bring back the weird. Volition. **Shaun Prescott**





Learning how to make giant burgers is important in these troubled times

Two Point Campus

Making learning fun, the hard way



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
ETA Out now
PUB Sega Europe
DEV Two Point Studios
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH Endless
ACCESSIBILITY Toggleable subtitles and camera shake; UI scaling, language, and audio language options

If you grew up in the '90s you lived during the halcyon years of the cheeky management sim: think *Theme Hospital* and *Theme Hospital*. *Two Point Campus* is Two Point Studios' follow-up to its successful *Two Point Hospital*, and like its predecessor, it injects arch wit into a genre that can often feel a little uptight. It's not just a love letter to those Bullfrog tycoon games of yore; it's a loving modernisation.

Players of *Two Point Hospital* will be familiar with the humour and user interface of *Campus*, which feels perfectly intuitive to play on PS5, though a mouse and keyboard is always a natural fit for games like this. For a simulator with such welcome complexity, it eases the player in very gently, teaching the rudiments of plotting out your campus, recruiting for specialist study fields, balancing the budget, and employing the all-important janitors.

CRAM IT

Of course, having a handful of lecture rooms, tutorial theatres and some dunnies does not make a successful university, so managing student happiness is one of the most important – and engaging – elements of *Two-Point Campus*. The obvious ways to improve student happiness are to build good dorms, sprinkle entertainment around the campus, and make sure vending machines are available, but more importantly, their studies need to be useful and fulfilling.

Two-Point Campus has a sandbox mode which

basically lets you go nuts building the university of your dreams. Meanwhile, the campaign takes place across several campuses, and all have certain rules or twists that you'll need to observe in order to progress higher up the university mogul food chain. Overall, adding facilities and making them nice will improve the overall rating of your university, and as you hit

"Scientography" and our favourite: Money Wangling. There are 17 courses all up, and learning about what they are and what they claim to offer their students is among the funniest things about *Two Point Campus*.

The game performs well on PS5. As the game progresses, some of the more granular micro-management tasks can become a little tedious using a controller,

You'll be schooling buddings weirdos, basically

milestones you'll earn Kudosh, an in-game currency that lets you unlock new (and often bizarre) furnishings for your school.

Oh, and if you're expecting the usual areas of study, think again: you'll be schooling budding weirdos, basically, ranging courses like *Spy School*, *Knight School*,

but it's a commendable effort overall: the thought of a game like this hitting consoles would have seemed fanciful only five years ago. Once you've adjusted to the natural shortcomings in this department, *Two Point Campus* proves to be among the best tycoon games on PS5.



Two Point Campus' cheerful veneer cloths a tycoon simulator with satisfying depth, eliciting furrowed brows and laughter in equal measure. Shaun Prescott





Soul Hackers 2

Gimme Summoner demons



INFO
FORMAT PS5, PS4
ETA Out now
PUB Sega
DEV Atlus
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 40 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Voice-over language switchable in main menu; vibration and camera tracking on/off; three text speed options (subtitles always on by default); adjustable camera movement speed and distance; invertable X and Y field camera axes; re-accessible tutorial tips

Don't catch us hearing you whinge about a dearth of new JRPGs: we're living in a golden age of sorts, following a period during the PS3-era when everyone claimed they were dead. So revitalised is the genre that Atlus has seen fit to revisit Soul Hackers, a relatively obscure Megami Tensei series game (you know, the one Persona 5 belongs to) that originally released for the PlayStation back in 2006.

Befitting the revitalisation of a little known universe, Soul Hackers 2 both reboots the original, while doing very little to advance the genre at all. It's a conservative, albeit immaculately stylish game: the art style carries all the colourful sci-fi flair you'd expect from a Megami Tensei game, but that dazzling veneer cloaks a very paint-by-numbers turn-based RPG.

Still, Soul Hackers 2 gets right to the point setting up the stakes. Your varied party of 'Devil Summoners' need to take down Iron Mask, who wants to collect a handful of ghostly figures in order to bring about the end of the world. That's a pretty straightforward motive, but it's the characters themselves – and the way their stories unfold via discrete dungeons – that do a lot of the narrative leg work.

WHITE HAT

Combat, as always, is turn-based, and it comes with a customary twist. Every time you attack an enemy, the Demon Summoners you used will be added to a

stack. Different combinations of Summoners result in different combined super attacks (called sabbaths, in the game). As each Demon Summoner develops more special abilities are added to their arsenal, which results in different sabbath attacks.

A decent scrapping system then, but it's a shame most of

it'd be nice if Atlus could take a leaf out of their own cherished Persona book, or indeed, learn from the recent (and brilliant) Scarlet Nexus.

Soul Hackers 2 is a fun 50 hour adventure that you'll likely forget forever once the credits roll. It's weird that Atlus bothered to exhume a dormant

The fighting is carried out in some of the most rudimentary JRPG dungeons we've seen.

the fighting is carried out in some of the most rudimentary JRPG dungeons we've ever seen. They're so repetitive and straightforward that you could mistake them as satirical takes on JRPG level design. Still, the rest of Soul Hackers 2's presentation somewhat compensates for this, though

series for the purpose of making a very straightforward and unmemorable JRPG, but then, it's possible Soul Hackers could become a kind of stop gap series we can look forward to between more meaty, Persona games. Either way, this is probably one for genre and series fanatics only.



Soul Hackers 2 reinvents the long-dormant series, but it certainly doesn't reinvent the JRPG. It's a fun 50 hour romp, but it doesn't advance the genre at all. **Shaun Prescott**



INFO **FORMAT** PS5
ETA Out now **PUB** Maximum Games
DEV Pulsatrix Studios **PLAYERS** 1



Fobia - St. Dinfna Hotel

If these halls could talk

You've probably gathered that survival horror is experiencing quite the resurgence, both in the indie sphere and among the bajillion dollar publishers. Fobia - St Dinfna's Hotel is an indie affair by Brazilian studio Pulsatrix Studios, with presentation that gives the AAA studios a run for their money.

Played from a first-person perspective, Fobia follows the story of budding journalist Roberto, who arrives at the St. Dinfna Hotel to investigate some weird stuff that has reportedly happened there. So yes, it's one of those haunted house horror games,¹ full of nerve wracking corridors and cavernous lobbies. It's a format that works, though: Fobia adopts the slow-paced and moody demeanour of the original Resident Evil and applies a bunch of quality-of-life improvements. Chiefly, a first-person perspective and no tank controls.²

Exploration and the story are both a delight in Fobia. Combat isn't the focus, but it's here, and as you'd expect every bullet counts. The enemies you're shooting at, though, are a little paint-by-numbers and not really that terrifying at all – the anxiety you'll feel trying to avoid them is the scarier part. Inventory management feels a little more punishing than in other contemporary horrors: several times we had to abandon something useful in order to collect a story-progressing item, only to discover much too late that there are storage chests littered throughout the game (without the button prompts shown for other interactable items). It's neither the most original or scariest horror you'll play, but Fobia has atmosphere in spades and was clearly crafted with love. **Shaun Prescott**

7
PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 Think Visage, P.T., several Resident Evil games... the list is enormous. 2 Other limitations remain however, like limited save game opportunities.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 (reviewed), PS4
ETA Out now **PUB** Bandai Namco
DEV Nippon Ichi Software **PLAYERS** 1



Disgaea 6 Complete

Numbers, numbers, numbers

If you adore watching numbers go up, the Disgaea series feeds that desire mercilessly. The tactical RPG series is notorious for its gratification of the grind, and this latest instalment – among other, more obvious changes – understands that impulse so well that quite often you don't even need to play it to get numbers to go up.

At its core, Disgaea 6 is a turn-based strategy game with an overwhelmingly saccharine anime veneer.¹ It has a story, yes, but it plays out as ignorable short cutscenes, or else conversations carried out in the game's hub. It's there if you want it (you'll probably quickly decide that you don't) but the focus is very much on tactics. The story progresses by entering various battle arenas and, for the most part, clearing out all enemies. Early on, things are

complicated by the appearance of coloured blocks that buff and debuff enemies and your squad.

The item world returns, in the form of discrete dungeons that can level every item in your possession to extraordinarily high numbers.² The new autoplay feature means that, so long as your squad is adequately levelled, you can set them onto these grind sessions without even having to hold the controller. Some have baulked at this, but if you're not a sucker for interminable grinding punishment, it's a neat quality of life improvement.

The new art style, which replaces pixel character sprites with 3D models, really brings the game to life. It's a gorgeous thing, so long as you can tolerate the whimsy. Series veterans are mixed on this one; but it's a winner to us.

Shaun Prescott

8
PLAY



FOOTNOTES 1 That's always been the case with this series, but the new graphical changes seem to amplify the whimsy; your mileage will vary. 2 We really aren't kidding: the level cap in Disgaea 6 is 99,999,999. Needless to say, we got nowhere near that figure, and you probably won't either.

INFO **FORMAT** PS5 (rev), PS4
ETA Out now **PUB** Bandai Namco
DEV Monkeycraft **PLAYERS** 1-2



Klonoa Phantasy Reverie Series

Get cape, wear cape, fly

You might wonder why two obscure platformers from the '90s deserve the modern remaster treatment, but in the case of Klonoa the simple answer is: because they're charming. This package bundles 1997's Klonoa: Door to Phantomile for PS1, with its 2001 PS2 sequel Lunatea's Veil. During a time awash in indie platformers – most of which usurp in quality their retro forebears – these two games feel like a portal into the past.

The music and presentation in particular belongs to an era of charming AA Japanese imports, with its carefree jingles, pastel dressings, and successful mix of 3D environments viewed on a 2D plane. But it's the moment-to-moment gameplay that feels especially, uh, old: both Klonoa and its sequel are eager to be played, with a difficulty level that shouldn't make any kid over five sweat.¹ The challenge is negligible, but that's not to say these platformers aren't gratifying to play: they're best approached as cheerful, relaxing experiences.

Klonoa can grab and toss enemies at other enemies, as well as use them to propel onto higher, otherwise inaccessible platforms.² The 3D / 2D hybrid provides depth to the levels, which often wind circular, with passages in the background that connect to caves and other areas of a level. For the most part, Klonoa is an action-oriented platformer, though it does often veer – mostly unsuccessfully – into puzzle territory.

Still, what's a retro-platformer without slight annoyances? Such a thing doesn't exist, and it's surprising just how well these Klonoa games hold up. Nostalgia is a huge factor, but it's nice to revisit.

Shaun Prescott

8
PLAY

FOOTNOTES 1 It does naturally get trickier with progress, but it's easier than pretty much all modern indies. 2 All the better to access the plentiful secrets.



Sword And Fairy: Together Forever

A huge, distinctive RPG with something unique to offer



INFO
FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
ETA Out now
PUB EastAsiaSoft
DEV Softstar
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 20-30 hrs
ACCESSIBILITY Easy mode

The Sword and Fairy series is a massive deal in its native Taiwan, with a profile that roughly equals the Final Fantasy series in Japan and the west. It's not tonally dissimilar from Square Enix's JRPG series either, though it has a slightly more grounded narrative, with one foot submerged in Chinese history and mythology.

Still, earlier Sword and Fairy games couldn't hope to match the production values of their Japanese equivalents, though this seventh instalment makes a heap of progress in that department. Ditching turn-based combat in favour of a slightly Souls-y stamina-based scrapping system, Sword and Fairy 7 (like last year's Xuan Yuan Sword VII) will please anyone who misses the immersive, narrative-driven grandeur of The Witcher 3.

MARTIAL HEARTS

While the broad strokes of the story are simple – some supernatural cataclysm threatens the world, etc – it's the characterisation that really impresses here. Throughout the lengthy story you'll play as a handful of characters, and you can swap between them depending on your party configuration at the time (this is usually determined by the story). When we say Sword and Fairy 7 is narrative-driven, we really aren't kidding: the first five hours or so are riddled with lengthy cut scenes, but the game does loosen the reins after a while, easing into a rhythm of questing, fighting, and dallying around towns.

The first thing you'll likely notice about Sword and Fairy 7 is how gorgeous it is. Sure, Softstar isn't CD Projekt or Square Enix, but what they lack in technical prowess they make up for with art direction. The many and varied worlds of this game are breathtakingly colourful and moody, and make

unashamedly story-driven RPG with an open-linear approach to level design. What you're getting here isn't a standout RPG, because everything from the combat to the loot to the special abilities are sufficient, albeit somewhat uninspiring. What you're getting is a standout experience: an

An aesthetic delight that is probably unlike anything you've ever played before.

up for some slight shortfalls elsewhere, namely in the occasionally awkward character animations. The combat is much more refined than even the turn-based system from earlier Sword and Fairy games, but it's a little on the stiff side.

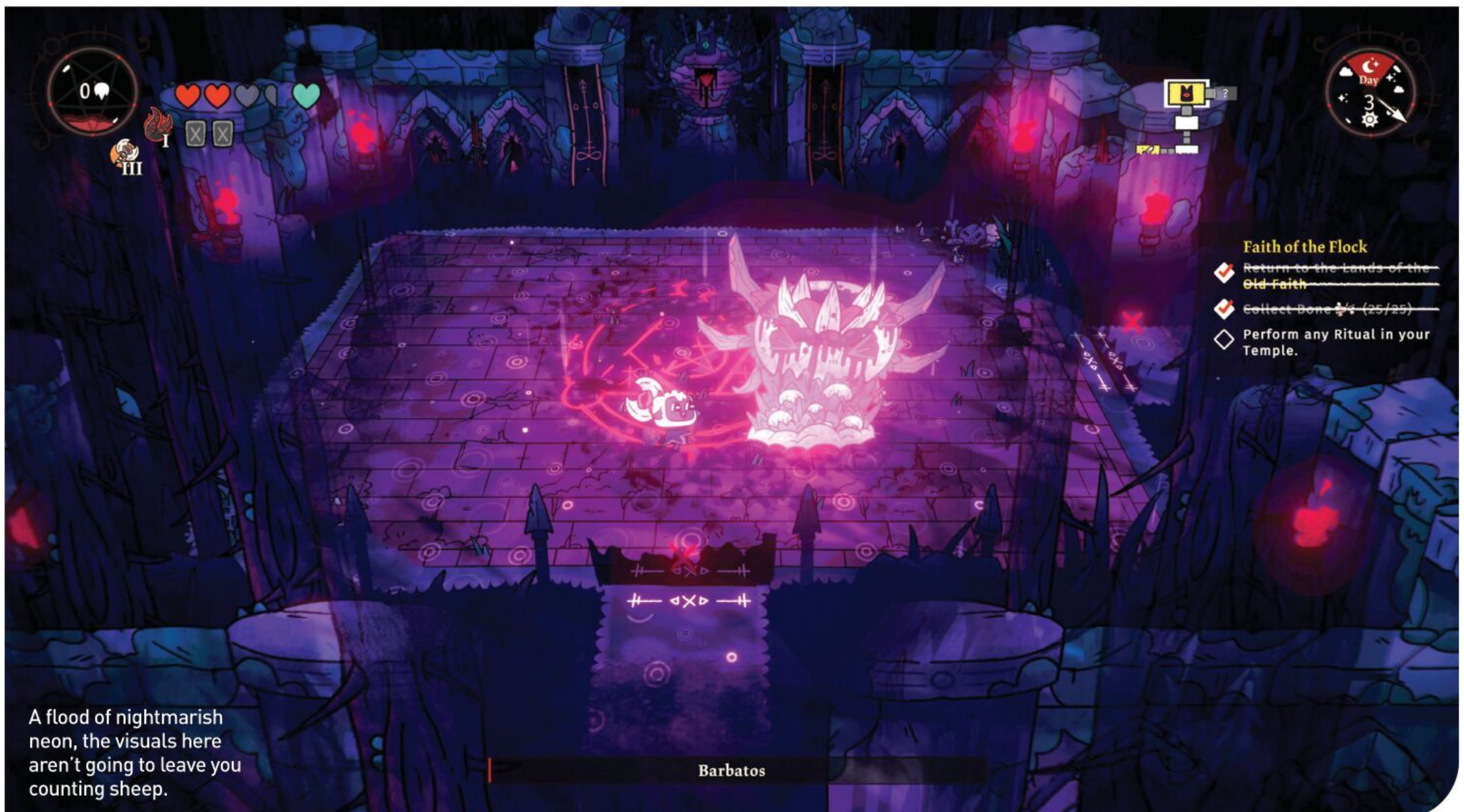
Fighting isn't really the main appeal here, though: It's a

aesthetic delight that is probably quite unlike anything you've ever played before, delivered in a package full of systems you've played elsewhere. If this is what Softstar is capable of nowadays, then the next game in the Sword and Fairy series could very well propel them into the international big leagues.



You could play yet another JRPG or western fantasy adventure, but Sword and Fairy offers a setting, story and art style that you'll probably never forget. **Shaun Prescott**





Cult Of The Lamb

Starting a cult? Mutton wrong with that



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4

ETA Out now

PUB Devolver

DEV Massive Monster

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 15-20 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY

Text scaling; alternate control schemes; difficulty settings

You're a literal sacrificial lamb, this story beginning where most others would end: at the moment of your death. Led to the slaughter by four fanatical bishops, your only shot at salvation lies with The One Who Waits, an imprisoned god capable of bringing you back from the dead. "Start a cult in my name," he commands in return for resurrection. You have little choice but to accept.

It's part roguelike and part management sim, and you spend the bulk of your first few hours as a newly revived cult leader venturing into gloomy forest dungeons arranged in floors. Snappy hack-'n'-slash combat pits an agile arsenal of dodges and slashes against room after room of more powerful projectile-spewing foes. The slower final boss fights can feel a little easy, but it's otherwise a satisfying test of skill which is only further elevated by a high degree of procedural generation. No two runs feels quite the same, and the appearance of an enigmatic tarot reader, who can draw power-up-like cards or weapons from an expanding pool of possible options, adds even more variety to the mix.

The limitations of these systems do become more apparent with time, but the strong variety of weapon types, which ranges all the way from swift sabres to slow and heavy hammers, keeps the threat of repeated rooms becoming stale at bay.

DIFFI-CULT CHOICES

On each run, you accumulate resources like wood, stone, and gold coins from the bodies of slain foes

and the destructible environment. You can spend these on developing buildings in your cult compound, the hub to which you return after every excursion. Things are kept relatively simple at first, but as you rescue more anxious animal followers from the clutches of rival religions you need to master more complex

with factors like starvation or lack of shelter increasing the chance of a rebellion, happy cultists are essential for success.

Their prayers are also vital for generating Devotion points, used to unlock powerful combat buffs called Doctrines. It's here that two seemingly incompatible genres' worth of complex

Mechanics are introduced in such a gradual fashion that they soon feel like second nature.

technologies like farming and resource refinery to keep on top of demand.

It seems intimidating on paper, but mechanics are introduced in such an expertly gradual fashion that they soon feel like second nature. An ever-present Faith meter makes it easy to track your followers' overall loyalty and,

mechanics are expertly woven together and, when combined with sleek isometric art and the hypnotic beats of the beautiful soundtrack, everything works almost seamlessly. There are a few sore moments during busy combat when framerates begin to dip, but this is one package ewe won't want to miss.



Masterfully blends two disparate genres without making many sacrifices. This quirky management-roguelike hybrid has the makings of a cult classic. **Dashiell Wood**



There's more to this than cat napping. Stray demonstrates in so many ways that it's definitely the life of a cat for us!

Stray

This little kitty is sitting pretty



INFO

FORMAT PS5
(reviewed). PS4

ETA Out now

PUB Annapurna
Interactive

DEV BlueTwelve
Studios

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 6-8 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY
Controller vibration, HUD, and on-screen jump prompts on/off; look sensitivity and motion blur sliders; invertible X and Y camera control axes; rebindable controls

When I was a young 'un, one of my favourite make believe games was pretending I was a cat. Yes, I know, you're ever so surprised – but it's not hard to see the appeal. For one thing, hissing is an efficient way to set boundaries, not to mention you can take long naps whenever and wherever you like, and then there's the terminally clumsy person's simple fantasy of possessing an ounce of feline grace. Internet spelunking suggests not only that my imaginative childhood pastime was far from uncommon, but that there's an evergreen sheen to that daydream.

It's a fantasy that has left pawprints all over BlueTwelve's debut project. You are a feral feline who falls away from the only family you know into a walled city inhabited by robots... and something that skitters in the dark. As a cat, you lack the linguistic ability to communicate with the robo-denizens on your own but you're soon joined by a friendly drone that speaks your language. Called B-12, and looking not dissimilar to a cybernised bubble-eyed goldfish, they quickly become much more than just your interpreter as you search for a way back home.

CAT FOR A DAY

As a cat, your path out of the city is delightfully non-standard. The opening chapter places you in the Dead City, considered the bottom of the pile by many of its robotic inhabitants. The mechanised masses are known as Companions and, in the notable absence of humanity, have fashioned their own language and culture. The ruins of what came before are all around but the Companions have these beautifully realised, post-cataclysmic environments their own. Besides the strong visual direction throughout, one of the most enjoyable



■ For one thing, you can take long naps whenever and wherever you like. ■





1
2



1 Environments range from bustling communities and sleepy villages to terrifying underground passages and atmospheric cityscapes like this one. 2 After getting over the shock of your arrival the robot Companions are extremely welcoming, but they share a city with more than one unfriendly force. 3 This agile kitty survives to tell the tale, but the Zurks and the Sentinels can still cut things short in gameplay if you're not careful.

» nuggets of worldbuilding is discovering which human rituals the Companions have kept up with.

In the Dead City you're given the freedom to clamber up objects on and beside walls to survey the city from ramshackle rooftops, pad quietly through narrow streets and confined living spaces alike, or generally be a bit of a menace – in short, to do just as a cat would.

This is far from a traditional platformer, though, with your kitty protagonist effortlessly closing most gaps; wherever you see a void bookended by a ledge or a table or an air conditioner unit marked with ⊗, the cat can make that leap without difficulty. The Dead City's verticality, along with its various nooks and crannies, allows this approach to movement to shine throughout this substantial opening chapter.

Exploration gives you plenty of opportunities to acquaint yourself with the confined community. That ranges from curling up beside a practising street musician to sneaking into the abandoned living quarters of those who last attempted to venture outside the city. Yes, you can be a furry menace too, scratching the furniture or meowing

to distract the locals (⊙ is your dedicated meow button), but this mischief isn't the focus in the same way it is in, say, *Untitled Goose Game*. When all is said and done, *Stray* is much less a 'charming cat simulator,' and more a short but sweet science-fiction adventure.

FELINE FINE

Departing the Dead City takes a surprisingly horror-adjacent turn as you finally confront that aforementioned ravenous threat in the dark. Looking like sanded-down versions of *Half-Life*'s headcrabs, the Zurk chew through flesh and metal alike; there's nothing for it but to run or otherwise misdirect these creepy-crawlies in your first few encounters, though you do eventually find a means to fight back. The weapon in question is an extremely limited option, and it's here, when things slow down, that the tension ramps all the way up. It's certainly a memorable finish to your time in the Dead

City, so much so that following threats fail to leave quite as lasting an impression.

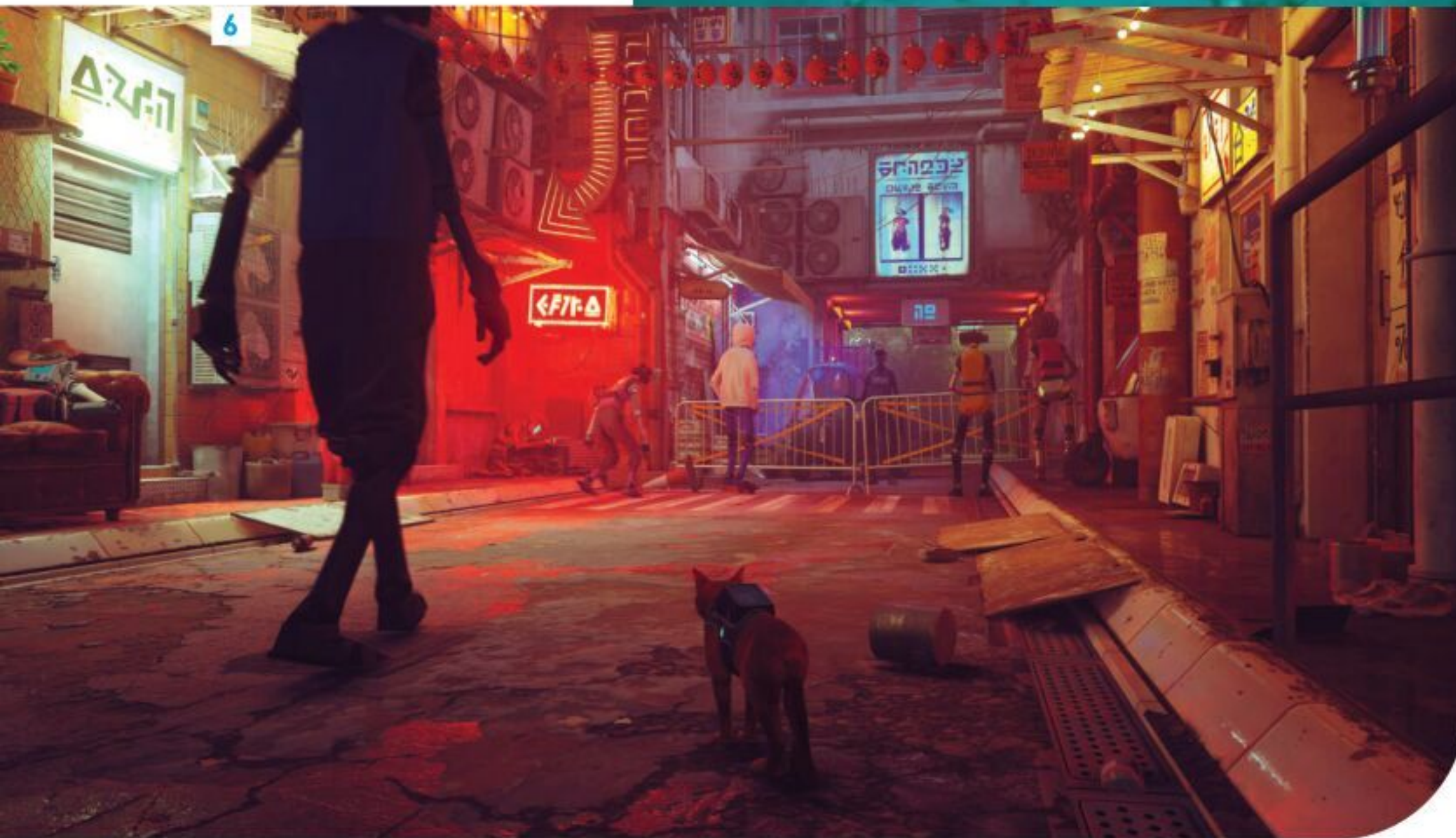
Instead, the narrative shifts into high gear and races through a selection of equally compelling environments we would've liked to spend a smidge more time in. For instance, the following Ant Village centres on one massive tree thriving amid a mountain of trash. There are plenty of robots to help or otherwise pester, but there's much less to do here, and all too quickly you're moving on to Midtown.

Surveillance is a key theme throughout this next area, as police units patrol the streets and the robo residents' every move is scrutinised by aggressive drones known as Sentinels. Your own movement is restricted as well, as anti-pigeon spikes plague what otherwise would've been vital paw-holds for you. As such, exploration takes a bit of a back seat for the rest of the game, and we do find ourselves missing it as the Sentinels

■ **Less a 'charming cat simulator' and more a short but sweet science-fiction adventure.** ■



4 B-12's translation makes every conversation look like a comic book panel. **5** B-12's journey may not surprise the genre-savvy, but it'll bring a tear to the eye nonetheless. **6** Lushly realised settings are one of Stray's strengths.



instead introduce a series of stealth sequences. Fortunately, your furry feline's agility is so well realised mechanically that these amount to breezy puzzles, though there's also little to them beyond the typical game of green-light-red-light-or-get-zapped.

HAVING KITTENS

From there Stray runs through rather familiar action-adventure beats – at one point you're even separated from your constant companion B-12 – but just when you think you've sized up this little kitty, it comes out headbutting at your heartstrings. The science-fiction story forming the game's core comes to the fore in Midtown, working to close things on an unexpectedly tragic and touching note. Don't worry, it

never gets too grisly, but the ending has us reaching out to hold our own furry friends close to us all the same – it also left us hankering to rewatch the 2001 anime adaptation of manga artist Osamu Tezuka's Metropolis, but maybe that's us.

Stray makes the most of its choice of protagonist early on, really allowing you to do all the things a typical cat would do, though it eventually loses sight of that in favour of spotlighting the short story. That's no cause for hissing, though it does leave the overall experience feeling somewhat like two kittens from different litters forced together. The combination works better than it should, but we're ultimately left wondering what could've resulted if either half of the game had been given enough space to stand alone.



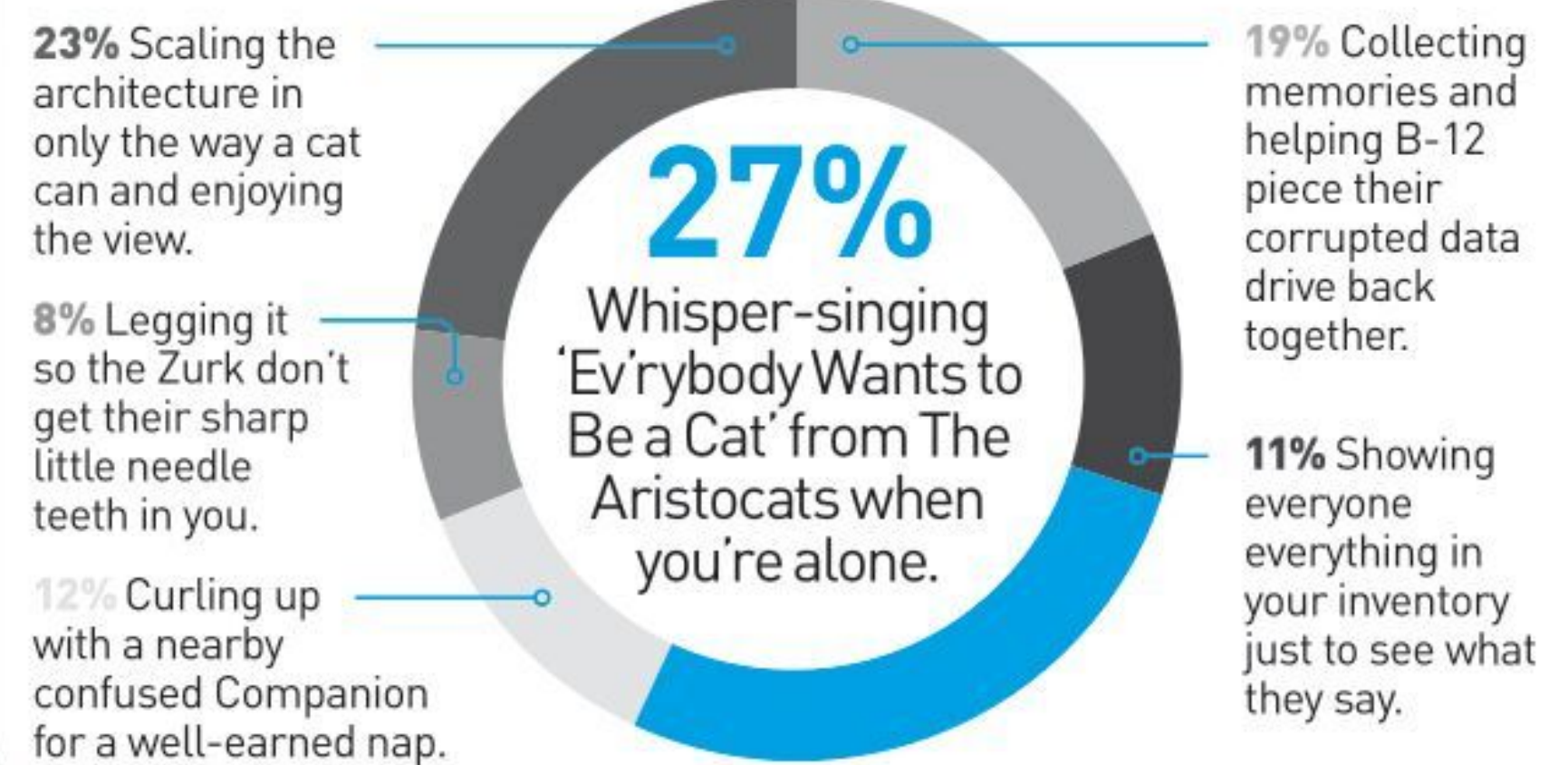
Cat's out of the bag – we love this! While we would've liked to spend a whisker more time in its world, it's hard to hold a grudge against anything that purrs. Jess Kinghorn

8

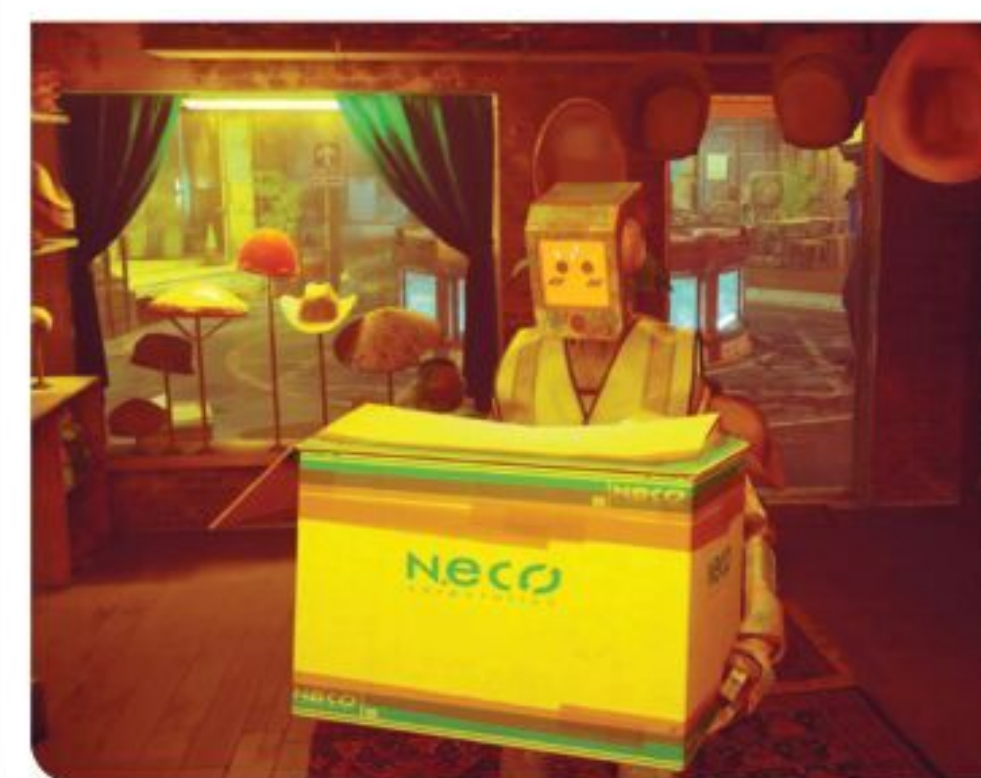
PLAY

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: STRAY



HOW TO... GET INTO THE HAT SHOP



First, you locate the missing workman – he's sloshed in the back of the bar nearby. After you give him a rude awakening, he returns to work carrying boxes. Wait until no-one's looking, and hop into the box on the ground by the van. He should carry you inside – a loose grate will get you out again.

THE DUALSENSE DIFFERENCE

DUALSENSE SPEAKER
You can meow whenever you like with **○**. A range of cat chirps can be heard from the pad and they're all delightful.



HAPTIC FEEDBACK
Whenever you have a wee kip or nuzzle up to a companion, the pad feels like you have a tiny purring kitty in your palm.

LOVING/HATING



CAT ABOUT TOWN
From the Companions' colourful murals to the Zurk's dens, Stray's visual identity is really something special.



STEALTH SNOOZE
While they're thematically interesting, the Sentinels simply don't have the same impact as the earlier threat, the Zurk.

TROPHY CABINET



BRONZE
Find the robots playing mahjong in the Ant Village and interrupt their game.



SILVER
Curl up and snooze for at least an hour – no, really. This is just what a cat would do.



GOLD
Get speedrunning: race through the entire game in under two hours.

Matches can quickly devolve into a chaos of explosive, colourful attacks, which is great fun.



MultiVersus

Come on and slam

Emerging from a cloud of smoke, Batman joins the fray, socking Superman in the teeth before hurling a batarang at... Garnet from Steven Universe? "This one's for Shaggy," he mutters, Kevin Conroy providing lines for the iconic character, while the Scooby-Doo hero powers up in the background, seemingly embracing the 'ultra instinct' Shaggy internet meme. The brave and the bold indeed – this is a punch-up for the ages.

The brawls hosted by moustachioed plumbers aside, the platform/fighter crossover has always been a genre that's struggled to land its punches, despite the promising character lineups in the likes of PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale and Nickelodeon All-Stars Brawl. Warner Bros, however, has invested in MultiVersus enough to make it feel fantastic as soon as you pick up the controller. It meshes together fighters that feel great to control as they hop between platforms and land comically large strikes with a unifying art style that smartly helps quirky Golden Age cartoons stand beside cartoonified live-action characters (like Arya, from Game Of Thrones).

GLEAM EATER

In fact, MultiVersus feels so good to play that its shortcomings are all the more obvious in contrast. These mostly stem from its free-to-play structure.



INFO

FORMAT PS5 (reviewed), PS4
ETA Out now (early access)
PUB Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment
DEV Player First Games
PLAYERS 1-4
LENGTH N/A
ACCESSIBILITY Remappable controls; customisable HUD; many toggles and adjustments for specific move inputs

□ × ○ △ □ × ○ △
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 ○ △ □ × ○ △ □ ×

Technically released in early access (though the PlayStation Store page makes no mention of this), it's more accurate to call this a soft launch. Everything is in place: a hefty fighting roster, multiple modes to play and, of course, battle passes, skins, and emotes, plus more to spend various currencies on.

Additional fighters are on the way, and some are even marked as 'experimental', so you know they're prime for tweaking. (Balance patches are already rolling out, as they do for any good fighting game.) Despite the large roster, only a handful are unlocked for free, rotated in and out every two weeks. Fighters can be unlocked permanently with a character pass from the founder's pack, 'Gleamium' (an

in-game currency which can only be purchased with real-world money), or 3,000 gold (which is earnable in-game, but that's a fairly large sum).

Everything is monetised, and the characters are one of few aspects unlockable with gold at the time of writing. Almost everything else, from emotes to skins, requires Gleamium. And a lot of those skins require 1,500 Gleamium, yet the smallest purchasable quantities are 1,000 and 450 – egging you on to buy more. You know the drill.

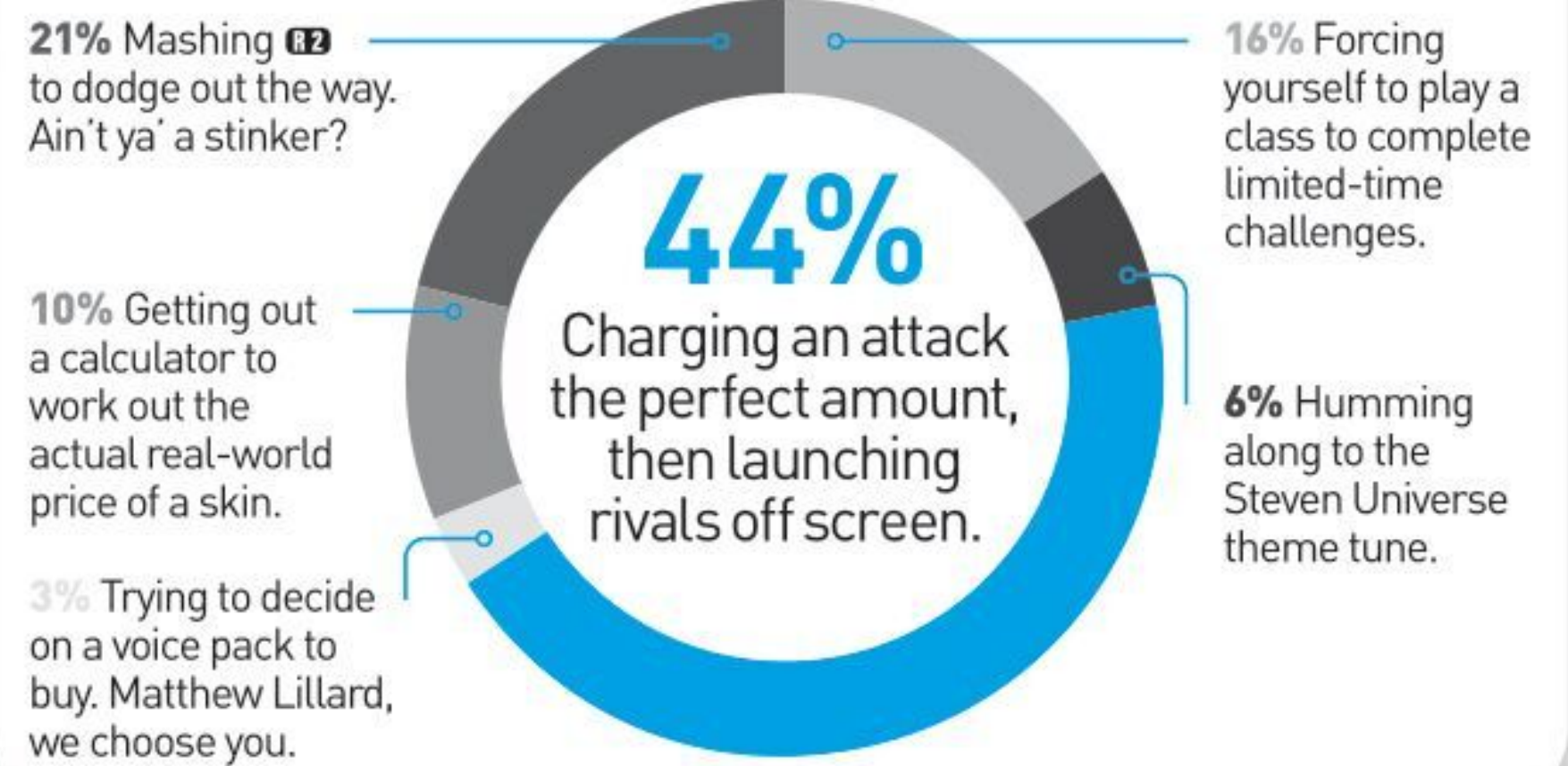
TOON SQUAD

It's a shame we have to issue all these caveats, as the fighting itself is rather fun. Three modes make up the core experience – 1v1, 2v2, and free-for all, all

Fighters feel great to control as they hop between platforms and land comically large strikes.

THE PLAYBOOK

WHAT YOU DO IN: MULTIVERSUS



HOW TO... FIND THE FIGHTER FOR YOU



Each fighter is categorised by both their whacking capability (horizontal, vertical, or hybrid) and their class. Mages dabble in tricks with cooldowns, Support are best in teams, Bruisers dish out damage, Tanks can take it, and Assassins can send foes flying.

STATPACK

15 Levels for each fighter, meaning mastering them feels genuinely rewarding. Points mean prizes, such as additional perks or character icons.

04 Perks can be equipped to a fighter at any one time, giving them boosts like extra air-attack damage or armour for one second after dodging.

\$30 The approximate amount you'll need to spend for a new fighter skin. We'd have to really like a particular character to spend that.

LOVING/HATING



CHARACTER FULL
Details ensure the characters feel true to the originals – just check out Tom's classic distorted wail when he's beaten.



MORE PROBLEMS
Free games often have microtransactions, but this is riddled with them – the options appear on most menus.

IS IT BETTER THAN?



Focused on indie crossover fighters, Bounty Battle was utterly joyless to actually play.



'Smashing' Nickelodeon All-Stars Brawl wasn't. Showed promise, but lacked MultiVersus' polish.



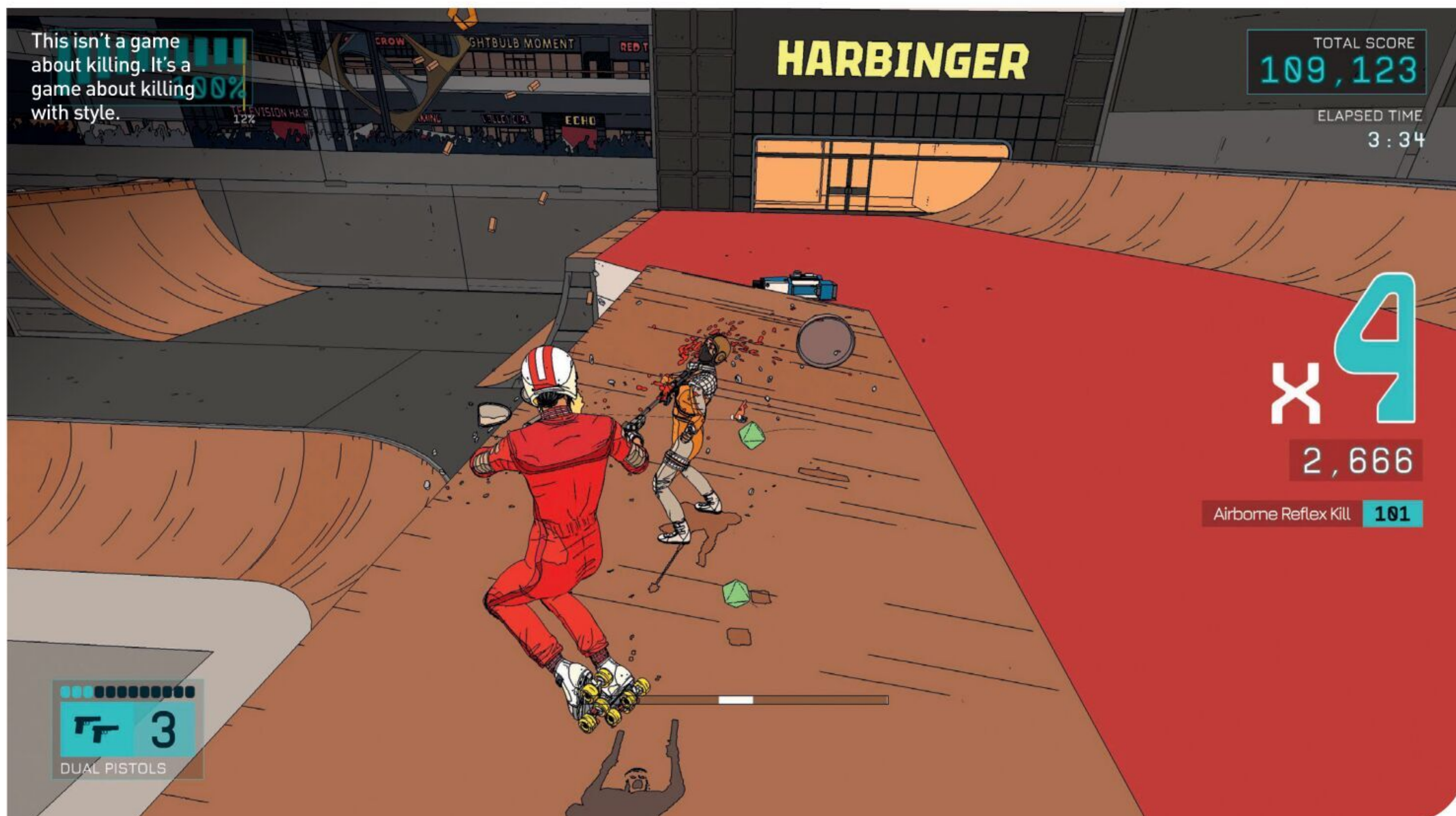
The icons were packed into PlayStation All-Stars Battle Royale but the gameplay was dull.



Full of love for the characters, and crunchy to play, you owe it to yourself to give this a go – though the monetisation methods are off-putting. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

8

PLAY



Rollerdrome

Wheel be honest with you, this is pretty good



INFO

FORMAT PS5, (reviewed) PS4

ETA Out now

PUB Take-Two Interactive

DEV Roll7

PLAYERS 1

LENGTH 4-6 hrs

ACCESSIBILITY Invertable Y and X axes; trigger effect, vibration, screen shake, and screen flash on/off; subtitles; adjustable subtitle size and contrast; invincibility; infinite ammo; adjustable game speed; customisable controls; no challenge requirements for level unlocks; easy slug shots

Jumpsuits and big hair aren't nearly as common in the 21st century as 1970s science-fiction movies would have had us believe, but the appeal – of the good ones, at least – doesn't lie in prescience. Rather, they tended to be visually striking, melding the prosaic and the futuristic, topped off with an atmosphere suffused with tension. In many ways, therefore, this is an interactive 1970s movie.

This is clearly intentional. The art is reminiscent of '70s American comics, and the soundtrack is driven by pumping synth to match. Heck, even the premise is reminiscent of a film from the era by the name of Rollerball. Competing in a deadly sport in the near future, you must take out all of your opponents in an arena to move on to the next round... while wearing roller skates. That's roller skates, not roller blades. Too modern.

The flexible trick system allows for a large number of grabs and flips – and you need them. The only way to heal is to kill enemies, and the only way to refill your ammo is to pull off stunts. All your weapons draw from the same ammo pool, but more powerful weapons demand more points to fill up. It's easy to refill your dual pistols within a few seconds, for example, but your grenade launcher is a bit more demanding.

LOVE-SKATE RELATIONSHIP

Enemies are auto-targeted when within range, allowing you to concentrate on looking cool. Just hit **R2** to start blasting, or hold **L2** to trigger slow

motion while it lasts. Your score primarily comes from cunning stunts, and the combo meter resets when you go too long without shooting anything. There's also a score bonus depending on how quickly you finish, and a score penalty if you drag your wheeled feet. Naturally, there are online leaderboards,

you play, taking out a sniper with a shotgun as you grind along a rail is something everybody can appreciate.

An important part of the appeal here is that it's a game that makes you look and feel very cool almost by default. Did you manage to stagger a riot guard, but run out of ammo? No

Enemies are auto-targeted when within range, allowing you to concentrate on looking cool.

and these will be the heart of RollerDrome for many.

If you're not interested in score chasing and find the challenge daunting, there are some fantastic assists including full invincibility. They'll prevent you from uploading your score, but are no barrier to challenges and trophies. No matter how

problem. Circle back, flip over his head, and finish him off with the bullets you just earned while still in the air (in slow motion, of course). While the campaign arguably has too harsh a difficulty spike at the end (and finishing it unlocks a harder version), we keep returning to put the skates on again.



A score-driven game that's stylish in every way, this is perfect for the competitive, jumpsuit-and-gun-loving beast desperate to skate its way out of you. **Luke Kemp**



Who knew there were such impressive courses in the afterlife?



Cursed To Golf

Driving you fore-rious



INFO

FORMAT PS5, (reviewed) PS4,
ETA Out now
PUB Thunderful Publishing
DEV Chuhai Labs
PLAYERS 1
LENGTH 4 hrs per run
ACCESSIBILITY n/a

Sisyphus, eternally pushing a boulder up a hill, had it easy in the afterlife. Struck down moments before the greatest golf win of your life, you need to contend with a smaller, more devious ball than Sisy did if you want to ascend from Golf Purgatory, using all your talents on the green to make it through 18 hellish holes and reclaim your life.

These aren't your everyday holes, though. As a ghoulish Scotsman explains (he helps set you on your way from his ethereal golf shop Eterni-Tee), these labyrinthine courses can force you to golf upwards, downwards, and around corners while dealing with obstacles like bunkers and water traps, plus TNT crates, spikes, teleports, and more.

On top of that, thanks to the meddling Greenskeeper you won't encounter the same hole twice, meaning your attempt to clear all the holes without falling under par (which pulls you back to the beginning) isn't predictable. That said, each biome has its own distinct quirks. The desert, for instance, has plenty of sand.

It's not only the courses that have underhanded tactics. You do too, thanks to the Ace Cards you can get at Eterni-Tee. These allow you to power up each shot you make, and range from basic cards like Practice Shot (meaning you'll snap back to where you were before making it, though the hole maintains environmental changes you might have forced – perfect for out-of-the-way requirements) to transforming your ball into a mini-rocket for a brief period for extra manoeuvrability. Each hole

is quite long, meaning you'll regularly pass into the double digits on your scorecard, but idols you can smash along the way keep topping up your par, which is essentially your health.

TEE TOTAL

The core golf loop is simple but effective, giving you control

Yet this is a lengthy game. A full run can take four hours or so, meaning you often lose a lot of progress when you mess up. For a roguelike, there's little progression between runs (you can bank some Ace Cards, bosses don't respawn, and you get a few persistent powers). It means things can get stale, and

These labyrinthine courses can force you to golf upwards, downwards, and around corners.

without being too complicated. You switch between your driver, iron, and wedge, and each club has its own situational uses. Power, angle, and spin all enable you to adjust how you land, and it feels fantastic when you sail through a line of hazards at just the right angle to nestle softly in the hole.

makes the prospect of another attempt off-putting. You can't help but play cautiously, missing out on fun experimentation as a result. Online, the devs point out you can trick the game by quitting and loading to start a hole again. We wish such accommodations were built properly into the game.



Charming presentation and snappy golf action. But the roguelike structure can hinder more than help, making fresh runs more gruelling than interesting. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**





PS5 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE NEW GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Deathloop

Endlessly stylish, we keep coming back to this time and time again. Trapped on a time-looping island, Colt must blast his way out by assassinating eight targets in one day, using special powers to get the upper hand, all while avoiding a (sometimes player-controlled) rival hunter, Julianna. With everything we love about Arkane's games distilled into one hyper-slick experience, this is a must-play.

02



Ratchet & Clank: Rift Apart

A delightful return for the lombax/robo duo, using PS5's power to allow seamless portal hopping and stunning vistas and DualSense to give the comically large arsenal real oomph. A real showpiece that feels marvelous in the hands, and makes the case for PS5 exclusives.

03



Demon's Souls

Not many games allow you to feel the thrum of a gigantic heart in the controller. From sword slashes against nightmarish creatures to feeling magic fill your hands, this stunning recreation of the PS3 classic is a tour of just what makes PS5 so great.

04



Uncharted: Legacy Of Thieves Collection

The best got better. Presenting Nathan Drake's final outing alongside spin-off The Lost Legacy, this collection implements a range of PS5 features. Higher framerates smooth out the action, haptic feedback boosts gunfights, and 3D audio adds a new dimension to the banter.

05



Final Fantasy VII Remake Intergrade

Cloud and the gang get a glow up with better visuals and slicker combat that limit breaks this bold reimagining of the Midgar section. Yuffie joins in with an extra story that bridges the gap between this and what's to come, cleverly playing on nostalgia and fan expectation.

06



Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales

A new hero for a new generation, Miles Morales swings onto PS5 with a new sense of purpose. The low-key story offers a more intimate Spider-adventure than Parker's bombastic escapade, but when the action kicks in the ray-traced visuals light up the screen.

07



Control Ultimate Edition

Jesse Faden's mind-bending, environment-destroying, object-chucking new-weird adventure sings on PS5. A frame rate of 60fps delights, and Remedy's use of ray tracing is among the best we've seen. The only problem is you have to pick only one of two visual options.

08



Hitman 3

On PS5 Agent 47's latest hit list looks beautiful – oh boy, those reflections. The good news is not only can you play the latest missions on PS5, you can replay all missions from Hitman and Hitman 2 inside IO's new PS5-developed engine. That's a lot of content.

09



Astro's Playroom

Free and pre-installed on your PS5, this is more than a showcase for your new console's best, most innovative features. Astro's Playroom is a beautifully-crafted, if short-lived, platform adventure that takes a tour through everything that makes PS5 so special.

10



Resident Evil Village

Ethan Winters discovers why this village's house prices were so low. As he searches for his stolen baby, tall vampire Lady Dimestreco tees off a host of supernatural nasties in the slickest Resi to date, mixing bombastic action with some series-topping fright.

11



Ghost Of Tsushima Director's Cut

Feeling like a fresh take on Assassin's Creed, the open-world island of Tsushima is engaging to explore, and thanks to minimal UI, endlessly beautiful. Combined with weighty combat and tricky stealth, this supercharged version feels like a real epic.

12



Gran Turismo 7

Like taking a bath in luxury motor oil while Yamauchi and the rest of Polyphony Digital relax you with cosy car history. The good vibes are matched by fantastic visual fidelity, and car handling enhanced by the DualSense controller for unparalleled driving feedback.

13



Solar Ash

Playing like a cross between Jet Set Radio and Sonic, gliding through the Ultraviolet feels buttery-smooth. The subtle rumble of the DualSense offers an immersive layer to both movement and the action of pinning down an enemy. This is well worth losing yourself in.

14



Guilty Gear Strive

If this is the smell of the game, then we don't need any candles. Brash as ever, and laden with head-banging tracks, this anime-styled fighter is a spectacle to watch or play. Pared-down mechanics make it accessible, but there's still plenty of depth for skilled players.

15



The Nioh Collection

Team Ninja is on top form with its unique samurai take on soulslikes. Tough as hanzo steel, both games run great on PS5, and offer nearly 200 hours of co-op demon-slaying action that'd put even Yojimbo through his paces. It's a challenge well worth taking on.

16



Elden Ring

Souls goes open world, and FromSoftware makes sure to do things its way: with minimal handholding, but plenty of digit-strewn enemies. Each hill teases strange dark fantasy sights just over the crest, and the game keeps surprising (despite some rare repetition).

17



Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order

Cal and BD-1 Jedi jump over any hurdles the original release threw their way, PS5's power making this feel like the game it should have been at launch. While a little safe at times, this adventure feels like classic Star Wars as you explore planets metroidvania-style.

18



Horizon Forbidden West

Stunning to look at on PS5, Aloy's new quest gets even more science-fictional. While more of the same in some regards (there are plenty of question marks to explore and camps to clear), in big machine fights the metal really shines, and there are some absolute units here.

19



Ghostwire: Tokyo

Possessed by ghost hunter KK, Akito has to put a stop to a masked villain who has unleashed demonic fog all over Tokyo. The open world is packed with collectibles and side-missions that explore Japanese folklore, and the DualSense-rumbling combat is punchy.

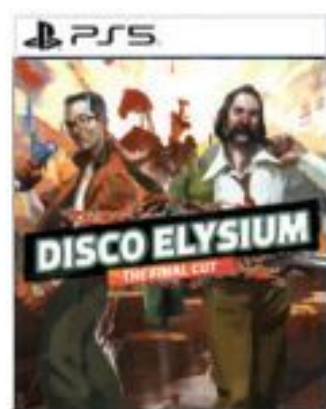
20



Final Fantasy XIV: Online

Endwalker presents a compelling conclusion to this MMORPG's decade-long storyline. The journey on PS5 from the beginning is a smooth one too, boasting breezy load times across Eorzea and beyond. Besides all that, who doesn't want to be a cool cat- or bunny-person?

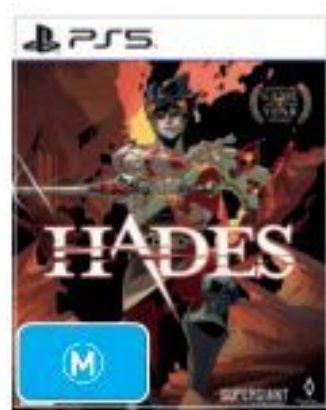
21



Disco Elysium: The Final Cut

Welcome to Revachol. You're a mess of a cop with no memory and barely any clothes. Solve a hanging, invent communism, sing karaoke... but do it your way. Skill check successes and failures pave a story of your own, and the writing is superb.

22



Hades

After a wait, Supergiant's latest rushes to the defence of roguelikes and leaves us going "Hell yeah." It effortlessly pulls off that 'just one more go' feeling thanks to fast, frenetic combat and the rewarding nuggets of story each death treats you to. Slick and stylish.

23



Paradise Killer

Welcome to the bizarre, regenerating island of Paradise, where the ruling Council has been murdered. Play as expert investigator Lady Love Dies and explore the vaporwave landscape, in which you have unmatched freedom to find or fail to find the truth.

24



Bugsnax

You are what you eat in this peculiar adventure that's not afraid to walk (and crawl) its own path. Scour Snaktooth Island for its missing denizens, wolf down a handful of Snax... and see what happens. It doesn't exactly push PS5, but it will test your imagination.

25



Grid Legends

Sticking like glue to the racing line between arcade racer and sim, this is Codemasters at its most finely tuned. A cheesy FMV story mode gets you in the mood to put your foot down and amass a huge garage of racing modes, types, and vehicles. The stuff of Legends.

PLAY ON

Know what you like and looking for more? Here are some PS5 options you'll enjoy



Has **Hades** got you feeling downright divine? It might be a game with heaps of replayability, but variety is the spice of life even in the underworld, so here are some picks that might scratch a similar itch, be they roguelikes or something a little different.

PICK #1



The Binding Of Isaac: Repentance

Crying out for safety

You'd expect a roguelike from Super Meat Boy co-creator Edmund McMillen to be a little off-kilter, but Isaac takes the cake... then it scuttles off and kills you, probably. Playing as the titular child, you need to escape a dungeon your Carrie-like, overly religious mother has trapped you in. The joy here is in the number of random combinations you can face during your run, and the number of modes and characters you can use to take them on.

PICK #2



Returnal

And then I just started blatin'!

Gods won't save you in space, but you'll be praying for good luck on your next run nonetheless. Housemarque's first roguelike might lack the mechanical bite of Hades, but Selene's attempt to escape from a hostile, creepy planet's time loop has a strong narrative that incorporates failure into the story, and looks downright stunning on PS5. Fully 3D, it folds the developer's shoot-'em-up experience into one with plenty of clutch battles in each new room.

PICK #3



Immortals Fenyx Rising

An ancient Greek epic

That's right, Assassin's Creed Odyssey isn't Ubisoft's only open world game inspired by Greek mythology, but here it gets a lot more literal as you use gifts bestowed upon you by the gods to fight monsters. Your adventure is narrated by Zeus and Prometheus, and it's your job to scour the Golden Isle's many kingdoms to restore their gods – the actual ones from the myths. If you're looking for a more straightforward journey through the pantheon, this is it.



Fly like an eagle, sting like a bee – a bee with a very big hammer.



PS4 Hall of fame

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE LAST GEN'S GREATEST GAMES



01



Red Dead Redemption 2

You won't find another open world quite like this, the streets of Los Santos paling in comparison to this gorgeous western sprawl. Arthur Morgan's wild west adventure is epic, emotional, and has enough teasing mysteries on every Horizon for no two cowboys' journeys to feel the same. Train robberies, tootin' headshots, and killing racists, there's never a dull moment in Rockstar's greatest.

02



Grand Theft Auto V

Laughing in the face of other cross-gen ports, GTA V on PS4 is more than a mere HD remaster. Upped to a glorious 1080p, it weaves together everything that made the PS3 original great, with new music, more dynamic weather, and a game-changing FPS mode.

03



God Of War

A departure in some ways but a resounding return in others, Kratos is back with a son *and* a ruddy big axe. Taking the legend from Greek to Norse mythology, this entry brings a lot to the table while improving on what was core to the earlier series' identity.

04



The Last Of Us Part II

Arguably the original is holistically better but there are few games that push PS4 to its limits as this sequel does. With near photoreal visuals, emotional twists that land, and enough new ideas to ensure you're always thinking, this is a slick followup.

05



Dreams

This is a feature-laden platform of artistic tools that enables you to create everything from characters, elements, and scenes to entire games, and resets any ideas about what a console 'game' should be and do. Dreams should be installed on every PS4.

06



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt Game Of The Year Edition

The White Wolf's epic journey is an RPG experience like no other on PS4. It's been made even more spectacular with this gigantic pack stuffed with DLC, making it a must-have part of any gaming library.

07



Assassin's Creed Odyssey

A beautiful open world where every Greek island tells a unique story, AC Odyssey is a epic in the truest sense, with lively writing, mythical beasts to battle, and a poignant Assassin's Creed story that lays the bed for all the lore to come. A brilliant spectacle.

08



Horizon Zero Dawn

A staggeringly large world that condenses cracking combat, accessible systems, and uncut eye candy into an action RPG that will please anyone. In Aloy, PlayStation might just have a new icon. Come for the robo-fights, stay for the exquisitely dense mythology.

09



Marvel's Spider-Man

Borrowing heavily from Rocksteady's acclaimed Batman series, this delivers the heart and soul of Marvel's superhero. It ticks every box you could ask for: perfect web-swinging, a powerful story, a roster of classic villains, and all of New York City to defend.

10



Persona 5 Royal

The most stylish JRPG ever made finds its definitive form in expanded release Royal. It combines dark and moving teen angst with unforgettable friendships that power you up in the heart-invading dungeons, and sets the gold standard for the genre.

11



Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice

FromSoftware's latest adventure repackages its unflinchingly difficult combat into a fantastical take on feudal Japan. More accessible than Bloodborne but layered with equally clever and subtle ideas, this is director Hidetaka Miyazaki's best yet.

12



Bloodborne

With the finest third-person melee combat in gaming, droolworthy art design, and the most twisted monsters imaginable, this is a gorgeously gothic must-have. The Old Hunters expansion adds enough nightmare fuel to make a return to Yharnam essential.

13



Monster Hunter: World

Presenting a vibrant open world, light on story but heavy on monster-mashing action, this is the most accessible entry in the series yet. Perfecting the feel-good grind through its complex systems and pitch-perfect multiplayer, it's a PS4 must-play.

14



Resident Evil 2

Powered by the RE Engine, this remake is more than a classic game with a facelift. The new Tyrant and improved zombie AI add tension, and fresh areas not seen in the PS1 classic update the core gameplay making this Resi 2 a celebration of PS1 and PS4.

15



Yakuza 0

Set in Japan in the '80s, this is the perfect entry point to the long-running series. Bouncing between two heroes, you take part in a crime thriller by bashing enemies into dropping piles of cash, and undertake side-quests that include stealthily buying pornography.

16



Psychonauts 2

Level design and narrative mesh together in this long-awaited sequel. Bounce around vibrant, ever-creative platform worlds inside other peoples' minds as you help them conquer trauma – and save the world. Ever-warm, the script is one of the funniest around.

17



Nier Automata

Few games require immediate replaying, but this *demands* it. The twisty-turny story reveals more just when you think you're done, and the android combat as you explore is top-notch thanks to PlatinumGames' expertise in creating character action titles.

18



Mass Effect Legendary Edition

A space opera in game form. Explore the galaxy as you try to stop a universe-wide threat, building a team of the best as you go. The adventures are better than ever in this smoothed-over version. A fan of science-fiction sagas? You owe it to yourself to have one of your own.

19



Days Gone

On the surface this seems to be a step backwards: a testosterone-fuelled Freaker-killing adventure, one man and his bike versus the apocalypse. Slowly you realise Bend Studio's playing with you, and everything's flipped on its head – while the action's excellent throughout.

20



Dragon Quest XI: Echoes Of An Elusive Age

JRPGs don't get more classic-feeling than this, but DQ embraces its traditional qualities, giving its turn-based fights and Toriyama-designed visuals a modern overhaul. This is an adventure that'll stick with you.

21



Dishonored 2

The follow-up to a PS3 great, mixing a creative skillset with impressive level design to create a Kaldwin-ning immersive sim. From the shifting rooms of The Clockwork Mansion to learning to link your powers, there's so much scope for experimenting.

22



Alien: Isolation

Explore Ridley Scott's original vision of a horrifying future in startling fidelity, as this game recreates the tension with an attention to detail that borders on the obsessive. It's time to remember what made the xenomorph so scary... and then get killed by it.

23



Shadow Of The Colossus

Bluepoint completely overhauls the visuals of Team Ico's masterpiece but still manages to match the original step-for-step in its remake. New controls and a beautiful photo mode add to the package. Wander's tragic quest has never looked or played better.

24



Tekken 7: Definitive Edition

The title for best fighter on PS4 is fiercely fought over, but for our prize money King remains the, er, king. Easy to pick up, with plenty of depth, few fighters feel quite as crunchy as this. With all DLC characters now released, from Noctis to Negan, it's time to get sweaty.

25



Mafia: Definitive Edition

The mobster fantasy comes to life in this full-on remake. What was once stiff now drips period atmosphere, and while the open world is still mostly set dressing, it delivers a rollicking and affecting crime story. Any limitations almost feel refreshing in retrospect.

STILL PLAYING

Games that continue to hold our attention

PICK #1



Grand Theft Auto IV

No, Oscar Taylor-Kent doesn't want to go bowling

Rough around the edges this may be from a modern perspective, but as Niko Bellic steps off that ship into Liberty City, I get the same goosebumps I felt when the game was first released. There's a grounded sense of reality here that Rockstar hasn't evoked with GTA since, making it feel almost more of a piece with Red Dead Redemption 2 than GTA V or GTA Online. But that's no bad thing. Instead of being a stepping stone between the SD era and the larger-than-life GTA V, GTA IV remains unique.

PICK #2



The Sims 4

Dashiell Wood is deleting the ladder to the pool

With years of DLC and updates under its belt, there's never been a better time to come back to The Sims 4. Building a new life from scratch might not seem like the most relaxing way to spend the evening after a long day at work, but the possibility of creating mischief I can't quite get away with at PLAY Towers is second to none. Why not try marrying your Sim into the wealthiest family on the block before conducting an elaborate pool-themed murder and living off the inheritance? All in a day's work...

The chance to create mischief I can't quite get away with at PLAY Towers.

PICK #3

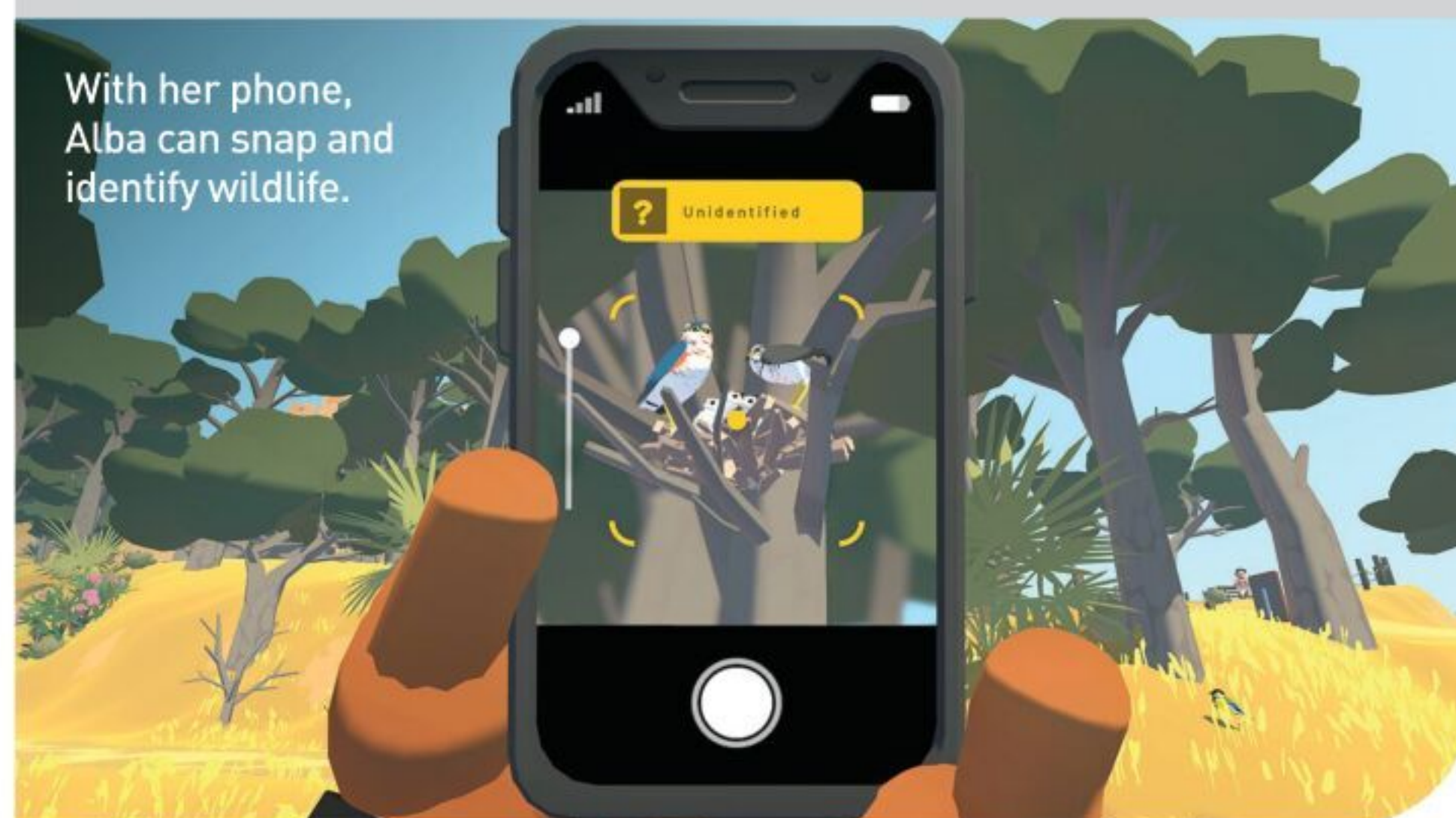


Alba: A Wildlife Adventure

Jess Kinghorn saves the world one turtle at a time

For those of us who've always had the eco-warrior streak, Alba is a sweet island retreat. You explore an idyllic, fictional locale in Spain, picking up trash and documenting wildlife. When a callous hotelier rocks up, he sets his eyes on bulldozing the local nature reserve. It's up to you and your bestie to drive him out through community action – the best part of this escapism is that it works. It's an empowerment fantasy for little kids, but the reminder of what we can achieve doesn't go amiss for grownups.

With her phone, Alba can snap and identify wildlife.





PSVR Hall of fame

THE VIRTUAL REALITY HITS YOU HAVE TO PLAY

01



Tetris Effect

Tetris, yeah? It might be a great game, but it's easy to understand why you'd brush this version off as 'just more Tetris' at a glance. Yet Tetsuya Mizuguchi's trippy, transcendent take on the block-based puzzler is nothing short of a masterpiece. Sure, you can play it without PSVR, but in the virtual space it really becomes next level, transforming one of the tightest puzzle games ever made into an emotional ride.



02



Hitman 3

Every mission in the World Of Assassination trilogy can be played in PSVR via the latest entry in the series. That's a lot of murderous action. It all plays brilliantly too, with the act of puzzling through hits as Agent 47 perfectly suited to virtual reality. One of PSVR's best.

09



Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes

Who knew bombs could bring people *together*? With one headsetted Defuser, and as many Experts as you can fit around a 23-page manual, no other VR game comes close for inclusive, endless multiplayer fun. Just make sure you don't let Ian issue any instructions – KABOOM!

03



The Persistence

This first-person horror roguelike offers perfectly sized chunks of survival bursts. It's everything you'd expect from a full PS4 release, but in PSVR it's filled with clever ideas, unique weapons, genuine jump scares, and fab looks – plus great couchplay as well.

10



Statik

Saw meets Portal in this fantastic puzzler. It makes ingenious use of the DualShock 4 by giving every button a specific function. You'll need to use them all to free your hands from the strange box in which they're trapped. An intriguing concept done well.

04



Rez Infinite

Tetsuya Mizuguchi's vision becomes reality in PSVR. This psychedelic rhythm rail shooter has achieved its final form. Its crowning achievement? New level Area X; it's powerful enough to bring players to tears. Worthy of its name, this is a timeless title.

11



Firewall: Zero Hour

There's only one game mode, a cat-and-mouse assault to find and either destroy or protect a laptop, but when the shooting is this laser-focused, who could want more? A PS Aim controller is a must to get the most from PSVR's standout shooter.

05



Astro Bot Rescue Mission

This pint-sized adventure packs charm in spades even if it isn't exactly chock-full of challenge. Bringing the classic puzzle platformer formula bang up to date in PSVR, it won't take many levels before you're calling out, "Beam me up, Botty!" Also, the nippers will love it.

12



Resident Evil VII: Biohazard

Can you can go eye-to-eye with the Bakers? Playing in VR raises the tension to almost unbearable levels and has gameplay benefits such as face-aiming, which makes shooting a lot easier. A brilliant example of how VR can improve already great games.

06



Star Wars: Squadrons

A fan's dream come true: experience epic Star Wars space battles from the cockpits of the films' most famous starfighters. Whether you're flying a TIE fighter or X-wing there's absolutely no thrill like skimming the surface of a Star Destroyer in PS VR.

13



Sniper Elite VR

With realistic gunplay at the heart of this series, it was always going to be a natural fit for VR. But its support for an array of setups and how it squeezes a truly impressive amount of tension into 20-minute missions means this hits the bullseye of VR greatness.

07



Iron Man VR

With a finely-crafted control setup that enables flight within small sandbox maps, and gives you the option to inhabit the designer shoes of the billionaire playboy too, Iron Man VR is an almost-perfect interpretation of the famous Avenger. It's a PSVR must-play.

14



Doom VFR

A new take on a classic game, this proves first-person shooters can shine in PSVR. A mix of control choices, including the PS Aim controller, ensures Doom is as fast and fluid in VR as it's ever been. Every PSVR owner needs this demon-slaying outing in their collection.

08



Blood & Truth

The truth? You can't handle the truth. But if you can, then you'll discover one of PSVR's best shooters, tied to the kind of slick cinematic narrative we're used to from Sony's non-VR releases. Blood & Truth is one of the most complete games for PSVR.

15



To The Top

This creative platform-puzzler enables you to scamper, jump, and skate across its 35 sandbox worlds with the aid of your PS Move controllers. It's as physically demanding to play as it is perplexing, and all the better for it. To The Top is a PSVR one-off.

16



Star Trek: Bridge Crew

Mixes the fanboy fantasy of nestling in the Captain's chair (or taking control of the helm, weapons, or engineering section) on a USS starship with the strongest co-op experience on PSVR. This is Star Trek's finest hour on PlayStation, and the community's *great*.

17



Everybody's Golf VR

Golf and virtual reality go together like ham and eggs or rhubarb and custard. Mmm, tasty. In PSVR you swing and chip shots, lean over putts, and become immersed in the act of putting a ball in a small hole. It's near perfection, and one of PSVR's essentials.

18



Sprint Vector

A crazy mix of SSX racing and obstacle course hijinks, Sprint Vector makes use of the best control setup on PSVR to deliver a near-perfect experience. A single-player Challenge mode and online races impress; only the poor single-player AI holds it back.

19



I Expect You To Die 2: The Spy and The Liar

A spy comedy offering a front-row seated experience. Known as The Phoenix to your foes, you thwart villains across six missions delightfully steeped in genre tropes. Short, silly, and slick – like only the best agents.

20



The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim VR

Though compromises have been made to texture detail and controls, you get all – yes, *all* – of The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim, including the expansions, inside PSVR. It's immense. The scale and organic nature of the world at your feet overcomes any shortcomings.

21



Beat Saber

With your PSVR headset firmly on and PS Move controllers in hand, Beat Saber feels like the game both pieces of hardware were made for. In it you have to master songs and challenges by swiping your neon swords through the air and dodging with your head.

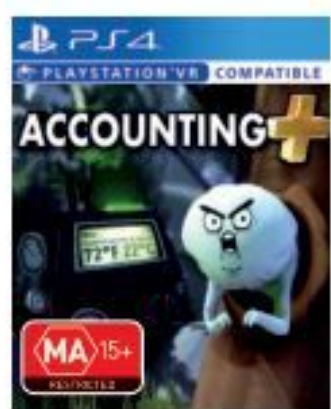
22



Moss: Book II

Arriving late in PSVR's life, this storybook followup spirits you away on a adventure that's every bit the mouse's whiskers. Quill's winning charm is back, and expanded combat mechanics sees your bond with the great mouse protagonist become stronger than ever.

23



Accounting +

One of PlayStation's funniest games is a dark, twisted journey into the world of accounting. No, don't walk away now! It's an Inception-like dive into increasingly bizarre and frequently hilarious scenarios that will scratch the itch of any Rick And Morty fan.

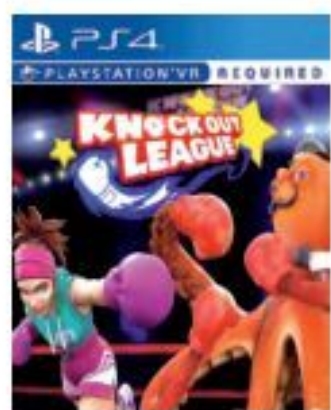
24



Farpoint

This sci-fi shooter is a brilliant showcase for the PS Aim controller, a versatile bit of kit that makes the satisfying range of weapons it stands in for feel weighty and real. The game matches it, delivering a strong story and challenging co-op for great VR action.

25



Knockout League

Punching things is possibly the least creative use of the VR medium, but when it's used to create a classic arcade boxing sim that plays like a brutal puzzle puncher, it's irresistible. It's also good for you: it tracks your calorie count as you work up a sweat.



WHAT'S NEW PLUS-SY CAT?

Digging into the random acts of gaming a lengthy PS Plus subscription offers

Last month offered bangers to all PS Plus subscribers. Leading the charge on PS5 and PS4 was JRPG **Yakuza: Like A Dragon**. Wheeling in behind it on both platforms was the **Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 1 + 2** remaster, before spooky puzzler **Little Nightmares** crept in only on PS4.

As fantastic as all of these are, we've got our eyes on only one prize fighter – **Yakuza: Like A Dragon**. This entry isn't just remembered for swapping everyone's favourite gangster uncle for new protagonist Ichiban Kasuga, but also for shaking up the long-running series' mechanical core.

Listen, leading man-with-the-blown-out-punch-perm Ichiban loves Dragon Quest, so much so that it shapes his entire worldview. What initially began as a well-received April Fool's joke in 2019 became a full-blown turn-based battle system, replacing the beat-'em-up action that's a mainstay of the Yakuza games.

It's far from the most sophisticated turn-based system, and late-game encounters suffer from a sizable difficulty spike. However, it makes the

most of the modern setting, suffusing every aspect with the series' trademark wit. Take the decidedly literal job system: Ichiban can become a typical nightclub Host, dousing enemies in icy waves of champagne while pilfering their pockets. Or he can take the lead as a Foreman, wielding a ruddy great big hammer to dish out hi-vis vengeance to his enemies.

However, a number of jobs are gender-locked. Only your female party members can heal fellow fighters' with uplifting melodies and manufactured charm as the Idol. The lads' Musician job is similar in concept but draws from a different entertainment industry well. We know it's a bit of a young man's game but Ichiban could have no doubt won hearts as a male Idol too.



Forthright Saeko is not afraid to make a splash in combat.



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RetroStation



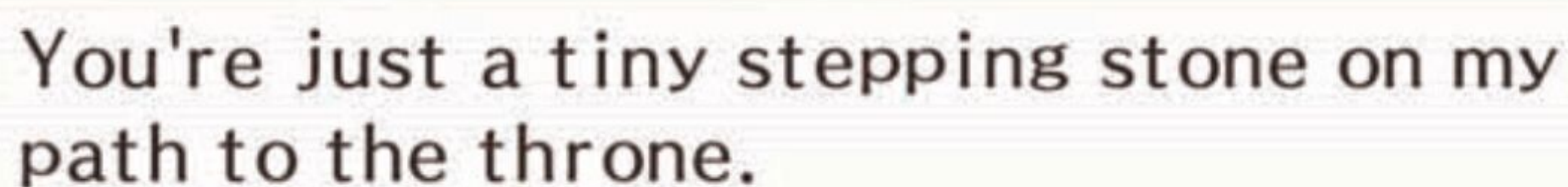
96 Defending...

Yes, he's a kidnapper and a murderer, but can Monokuma be defended nonetheless?

HIGHLIGHTS

CLASSIC GAME: DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS 88 | FEATURE: CROSS-GENERATION GAMES 90
A BRIEF HISTORY OF... NAUGHTY DOG 97 | PARTING SHOT: HORIZON ZERO DAWN 98

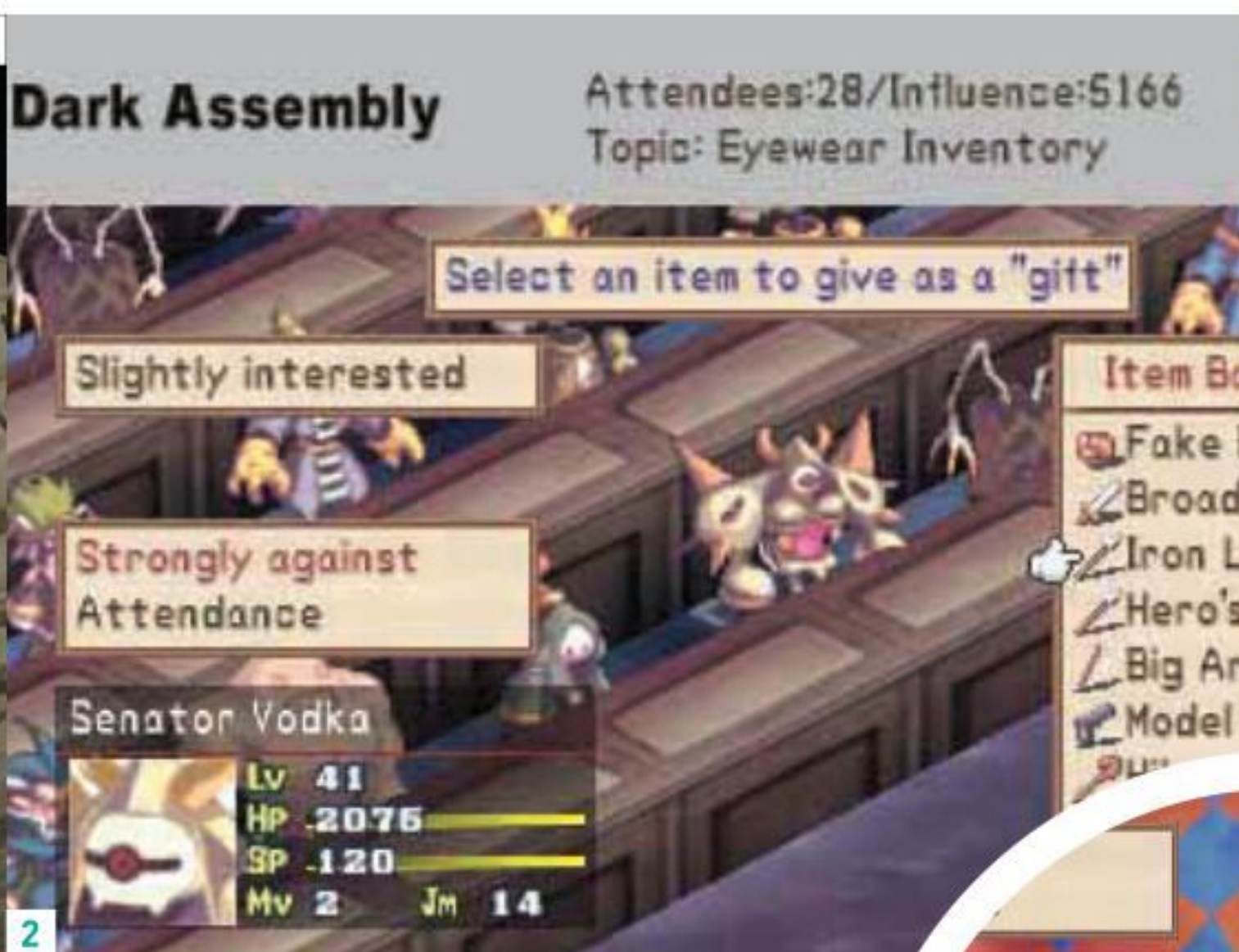




Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness

The road to hell is paved with grid-based tiles





Turn-based strategy JRPGs always used to be serious affairs, telling tales of warring armies and heroic sacrifices. At least, they were until Nippon Ichi Software turned its hand to the genre in the early 2000s, led by irreverence, absurd humour, and a knack for binding together bizarre ideas. From that heady concoction was born Disgaea, the clown prince of strategy RPGs.

Nearly 20 years after its PS2 release, six mainline releases and numerous spin-offs down the road, there's still nothing quite like the first Disgaea. Its magic comes from two factors: unapologetic silliness and almost bottomless depth. On picking up the game, you might assume you're playing something light and undemanding thanks to its zany script and cartoon visuals. Hundreds of hours later, as your brain wrestles with the demands of another dungeon, you'll probably look back and smile at such naiveté.

Disgaea's outlandish story and characters definitely remain part of its appeal, however. The star of the show is

The story then steers into a number of amusingly unexpected turns thanks to a richly odd support cast, including Laharl's vassal Etna, an angel called Flonne who wants to find out if demons are capable of love, and a retro-futuristic trio from Earth – Gordon, Jennifer, and Thursday the robot. And, of course, no Disgaea would be complete without series mascots the Prinnies, the long-suffering, penguin-like servants of the underworld.

GEO STORM

The long-term draw of Disgaea, though, lies elsewhere, in its flexible grid-based combat. Naturally, your squad of fighters can learn a plethora of attacks, special skills, and spells, but the aim is not simply to move and strike, but to arrange elaborate strings of techniques that execute in sequence and combine for surprisingly large damage numbers. Surround a foe with a few units, for instance, and you can create a chain of assaults, preferably with characters placed next to the attackers to add a support buff. Alternatively, if you need to cover space quickly, characters can pick up and throw one another.

- 1 Disgaea 1 Complete on PS4 includes high-res sprites.
- 2 Visit the Dark Assembly to unlock extra features – if the senators agree.
- 3 The humour is generally strong, though some jokes haven't aged so well.
- 4 Be careful when throwing prinnies – they explode.
- 5 Hire a range of humans and monsters to be your henchmen.

Geo symbols are coloured pyramids that fill a single grid panel. When you throw one onto a coloured square it grants a special effect to all squares of that colour – making characters weaker or stronger, perhaps, or even invincible. These qualities often affect your attack plans, but an even bigger deal is that you can destroy geo symbols, and if you position enough of them correctly, cause chain reactions of destruction. It's a complex process, like precisely arranging dozens of dominoes so you can knock them all down with a single flick. But there are few strategic triumphs as satisfying as seeing the results, as one broken geo symbol leads to a total wipeout.

Ultimately, the post-story challenges may become a grind, but thanks to randomised levels in the item world, as your characters' levels roll into the hundreds and then into the thousands, it never feels stale. Far from a silly distraction, it provides more tactical depth than most strategy RPGs could dream of. Seriously. ■

“There's still nothing like the first Disgaea. Its magic comes from two factors: unapologetic silliness and almost bottomless depth.”

Laharl, a prince of a demonic underworld who wakes up from a two-year slumber to discover his father, the king, is dead. With a range of evil pretenders closing in on the throne, he sets out to reassert his royal privilege and claim the title of Overlord. From this reversal of the typical RPG premise – you're effectively playing the arrogant, delusional villain – Disgaea pokes fun at genre tropes with a knowing wink. Upon meeting his first main opponent, for example, who refers to himself as 'Dark Adonis,' Laharl decides to call him 'Mid-boss' instead.

The most mind-melting decisions, though, are often prompted by the environment, especially when you go off track from story missions into Disgaea's infamous 'item world.' Here, you actually enter one of the weapons or items in your possession and find yourself inside a multi-floored dungeon. The further you progress through it, the stronger the bonus gear you acquire and the more powerful the item becomes. To get the biggest rewards, however, you need to master the game's biggest tactical conundrum – geo symbols.



NEED TO KNOW

- 1 The PSP version is subtitled Afternoon Of Darkness.
- 2 It includes a mode where Laharl dies and Etna is the main character.
- 3 Disgaea creator and NIS president Sohei Niikawa initially worked for the company in marketing.



A cosmic background featuring a vibrant blue nebula with wispy, glowing clouds. Numerous bright stars of varying sizes are scattered across the dark blue space. In the upper left, a portion of a planet's horizon is visible, showing a dark, rocky surface. The overall scene is a deep space vista.

TALKIN' 'BOUT CROSS- GENERATION

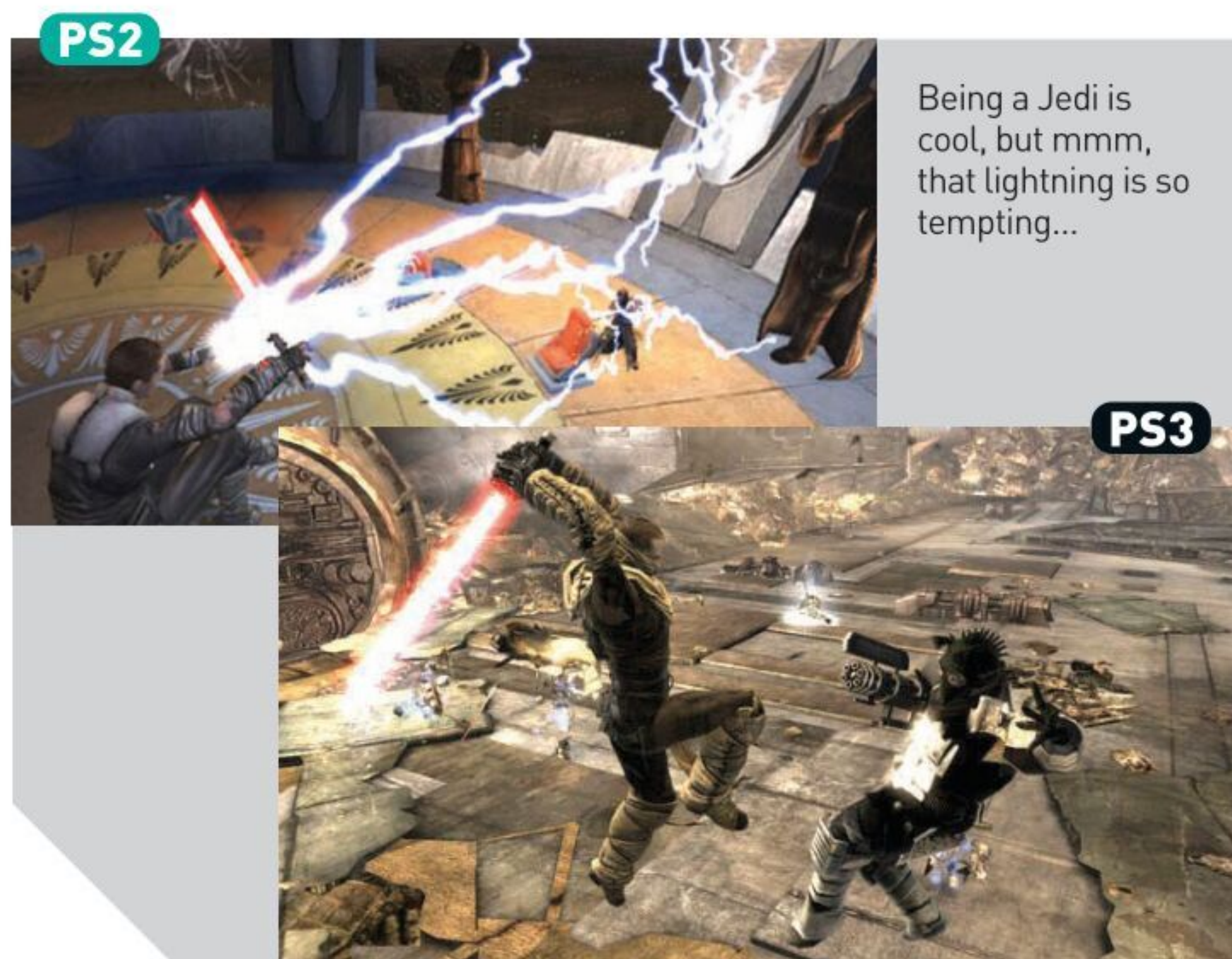


The force may have been unleashed across both PS2 and PS3, but the visuals remained leashed on the older hardware.

While transitioning to a new console generation it's not uncommon for publishers to continue supporting the previous one with a much larger established userbase. But while we've become used to being able to play

pretty much the same game but with a few improvements on a newer system with PS5 and PS4, it used to be a different story. Before now, hardware leaps represented huge, fundamental shifts in how games were made, whether that was in the online elements, the move from standard definition to high definition, or

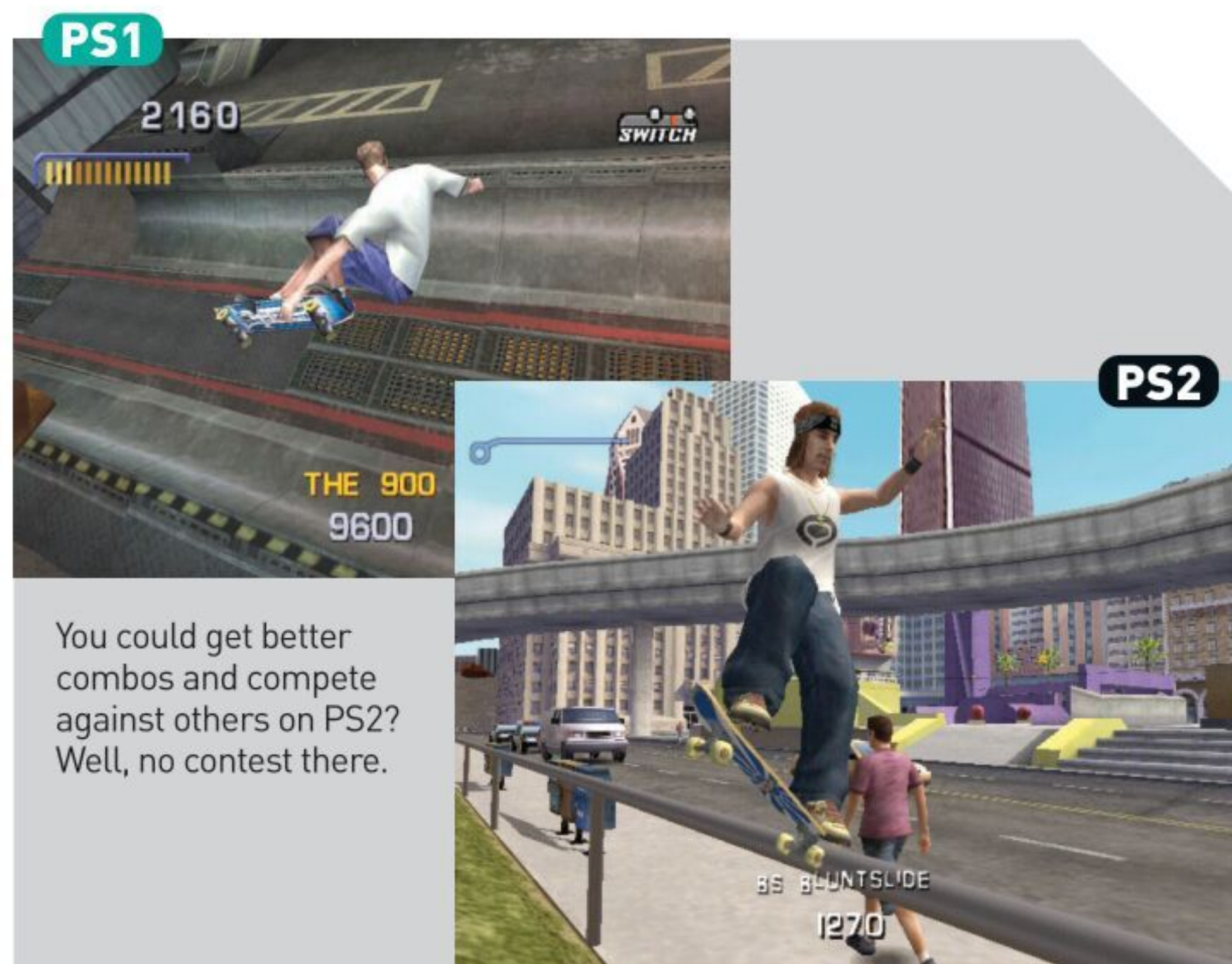
simply the power of the technology. That sometimes meant games released for the previous generation were missing features or were essentially different games, sometimes even made by different developers. Join us as we look at some of the most notable cross-gen games that had unique alter egos.



Star Wars: The Force Unleashed

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** LUCASARTS
DEV LUCASARTS (PS3), KROME (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2008

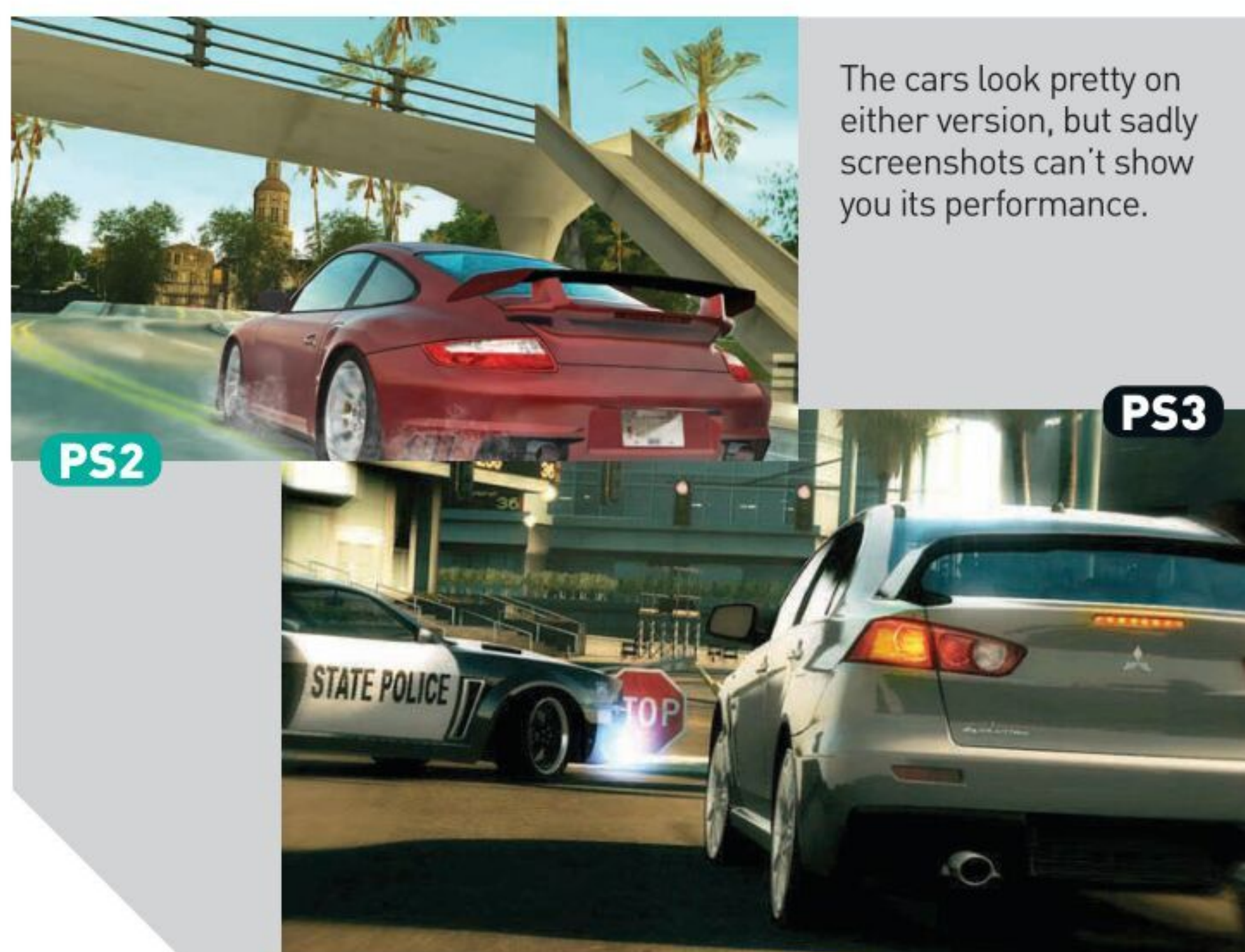
01 Darth Vader's secret-apprentice-turned-Rebel-Alliance-founder Starkiller looked better on PS3, where it had the Ronin Engine to power its HD graphics. The PS2 version was handled by Krome, but also featured totally new levels – or rather it interspersed the campaign with Jedi trials that could only be unlocked on PS3 via DLC. This was because the concept of DLC only took off on PS3, which had an internal hard drive. PSP players got another bonus: exclusive levels based on iconic duels from the Star Wars saga.



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

FORMAT PS2, PS1 / **PUB** ACTIVISION 02
DEV NEVERSOFT / **RELEASED** 2001

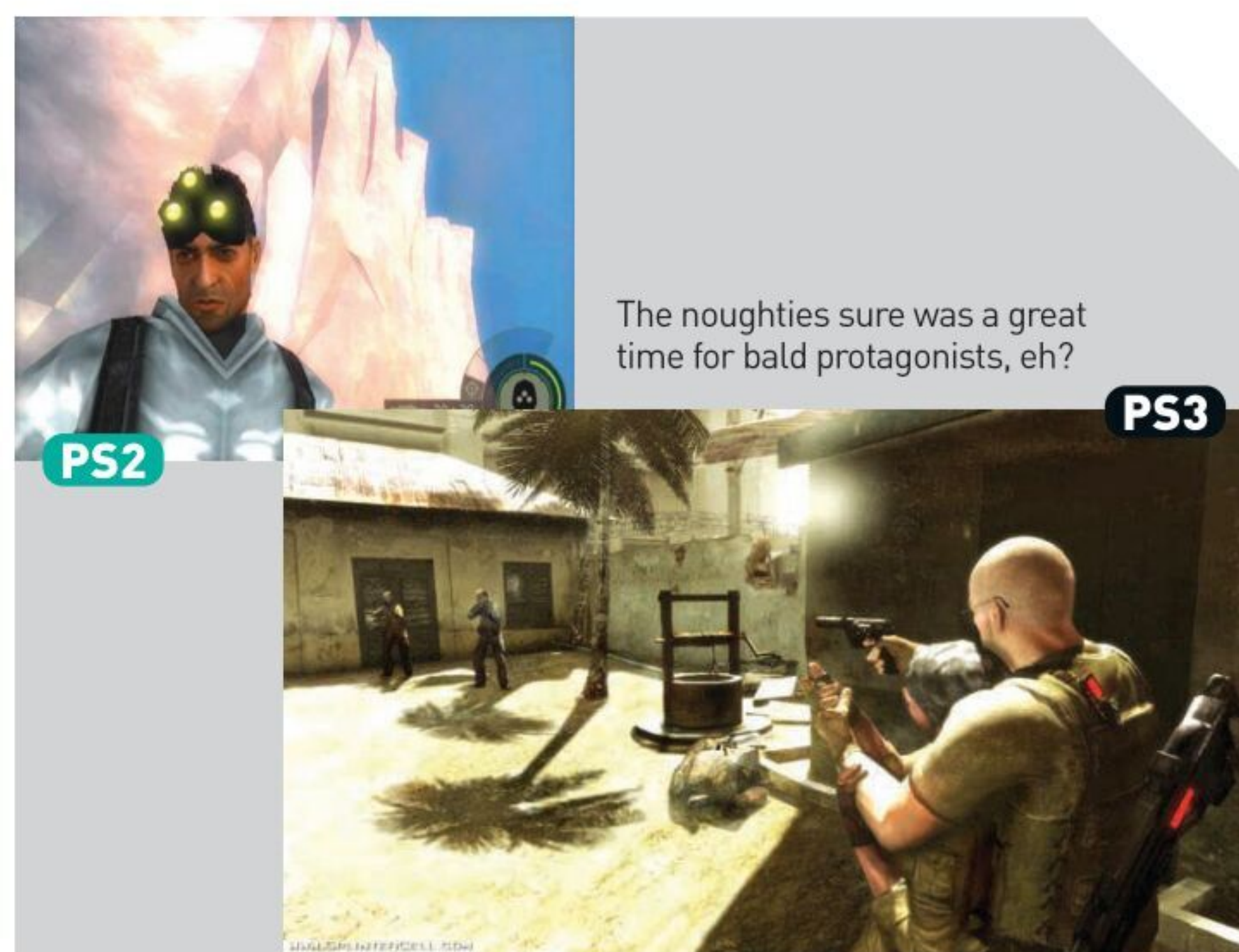
02 The Birdman's leap to PS2 didn't leave PS1 behind, although the latter was essentially a legacy port. It was developed using the same engine as THPS2, whereas the PS2 version used a new engine and ran at a smoother framerate. Much of the content was the same across both versions, although apart from the revert mechanic new tricks such as freestyling and lip trick combos were only possible on PS2. The other major difference was that the PS2 version supported online play – the first game on the console to do so.



Need For Speed: Undercover

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** EA / **DEV** AVALANCHE SOFTWARE (PS3), EXIENT ENTERTAINMENT (PS2), PIRANHA GAMES (PSP) / **RELEASED** 2008

03 Here's a rarity: a case where an older-gen game was actually better than the one made for the newer console. The PS3 version may have boasted widescreen HD graphics and more cars, but the extra features like cross traffic seemed to result in consistently worse framerates compared to the PS2 version. If you played on PS2, you also got other features like the Challenge Series mode, the option to unlock and race in police cars, and more importantly, splitscreen multiplayer. Sure, you could play online on PS3, but nothing beats good old split-screen.



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / **PUB** UBISOFT / **DEV** UBISOFT MILAN/UBISOFT SHANGHAI (PS3), UBISOFT MONTRÉAL (PS2) / **RELEASED** 2006

04 Given Sam Fisher's experience varied depending on which console you played on, Double Agent was an apt title. While Ubisoft's Milan and Shanghai teams built a custom engine for the PS3 version, Montréal stuck with the previous games' engine. This resulted in two very different games despite sharing a similar plot in which Fisher goes undercover shortly after mourning the death of his daughter. While they covered some of the same locations, the levels' design and plot twists varied drastically, including one pivotal decision that affected the ending in the PS3 version but not the PS2 one.



The God Of War-like werehog action wasn't *that* bad, just not what you'd expect or want from a Sonic game.

PS3

PS2



Sonic Unleashed

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / PUB SEGA / DEV SONIC TEAM (PS3), SONIC TEAM & DIMPS (PS2) / RELEASED 2008

05

After ushering the Blue Blur into a new generation with the 2006 reboot proved a disaster, Sega

decided its mascot would work across generations for the followup. But just as Sonic would turn from his iconic form into a larger, meaner-looking werehog, the PS3 and PS2 versions were night and day in how they looked and played.

The daytime stages incorporated both 3D movement and side-scrolling elements plus a new quickstep mechanic across both games. Dimps, known for its work on

handheld Sonic games, assisted with the daytime stage design on the PS2 version, though that edition ended up with fewer of these stages and more of the slower, combat-oriented night time ones where you're a werehog.

Fighting felt different on PS2 as you had a button for each of the

whereas on PS3 this was just one long gauge you could hit whenever you needed it. Perhaps the biggest difference was that medals were awarded to you based on your rank on PS2, whereas on PS3 they were placed around levels as collectibles.

The PS3 version was made on the Hedgehog Engine (as used to make recent Sonic titles), which was more powerful than PS2 could handle, so the latter relied on prerendered cutscenes.

And instead of having explorable hubs like on PS3, PS2 players were reduced to navigating a menu with portraits of NPCs. All that means completionists need to finish two werehog adventures, not one. Sorry!

"The PS3 and PS2 versions were night and day in how they looked and played."

werehog's arms, while other inputs, such as for running or grabbing enemies, were also different. In daytime stages you needed to collect enough rings to fill up individual bars to use Sonic's boost mechanic,

PS2



Good luck using a palm tree for cover. On PS3, the world really does feel at war, with brown filters aplenty.

PS3



Call Of Duty: World At War

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / PUB ACTIVISION / DEV TREYARCH (PS3), REBELLION (PS2) / RELEASED 2008

05

This wasn't actually Call Of Duty's first cross-gen release – that honour goes to

2006's Call Of Duty 3, which also served as a PS3 launch title.

However, two years on, you might have assumed the series' first title that moves into the Black Ops storyline would be a generation exclusive.

Instead, World At War would be the final Call Of Duty release for PS2, although it wasn't handled by Treyarch but outsourced to Rebellion, which developed it using its own

custom in-house engine, Asura, with this game getting the additional subtitle 'Final Front'.

Whereas the PS3 version had you play American and Soviet campaigns from the Pacific and East European theatres of war respectively, Final Front's campaign was totally different,

“On PS3 World At War introduced a series staple: Zombies mode.”

with a new set of characters (although the American soldiers you play as in both versions share the surname Miller). Instead of the Soviets, the European missions saw

you playing as a mixture of American and British soldiers during the Battle Of The Bulge as well as taking over Hitler's birthplace in Austria.

With 13 missions, Final Front was a sizeable campaign, although it was restricted in some ways. For example, its tank mission was on

rails rather than free-roaming like on PS3. And that was your lot, as you got none of the multiplayer options, such as co-op, split-screen, and online

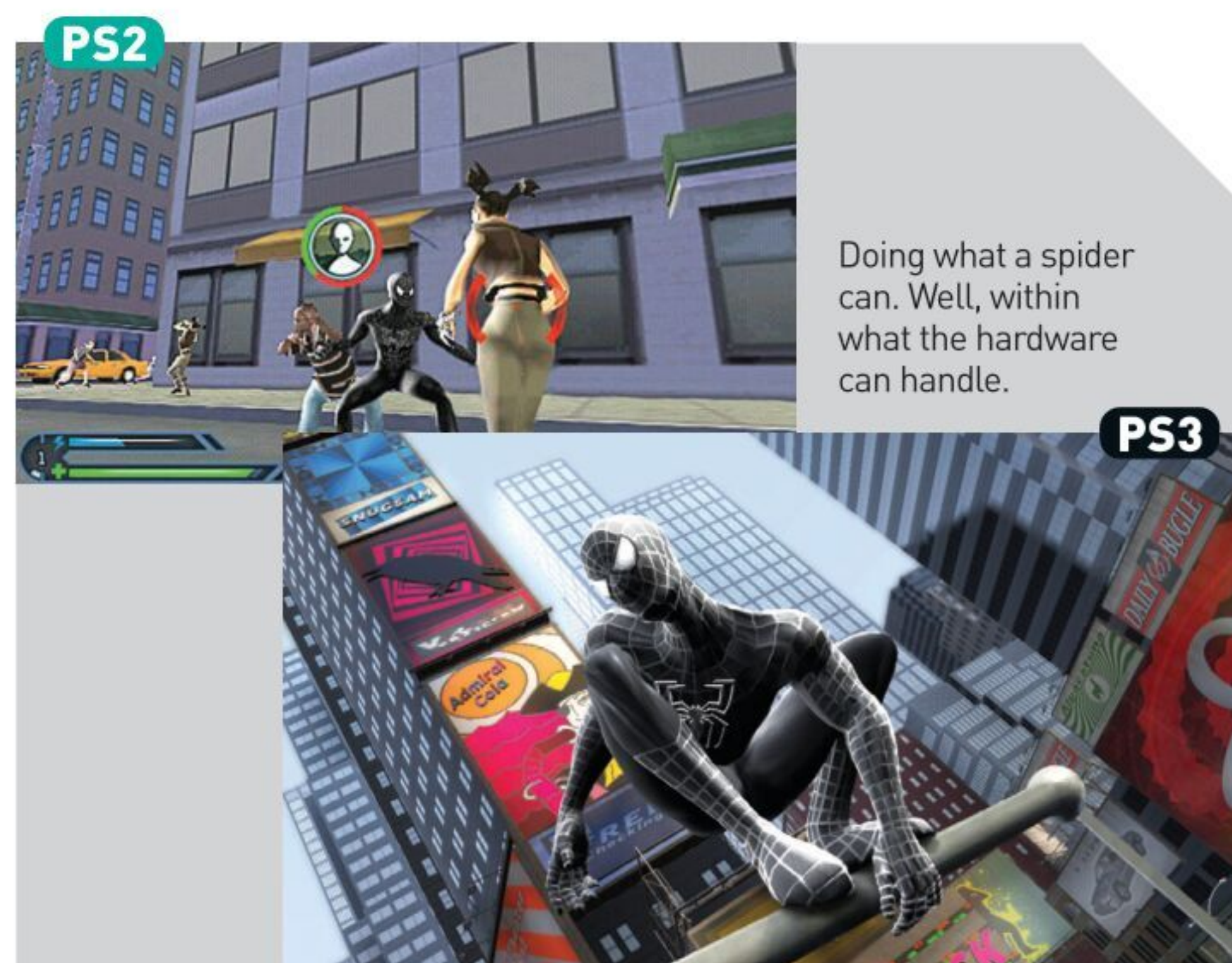
multiplayer, that were available on PS3. On PS3 World At War introduced the series staple of a Zombies multiplayer mode, which was missing from the PS2 version.



Dynasty Warriors 6

FORMAT PS3, PS2 / **PUB** KOEI
DEV OMEGA FORCE / **RELEASED** 2008

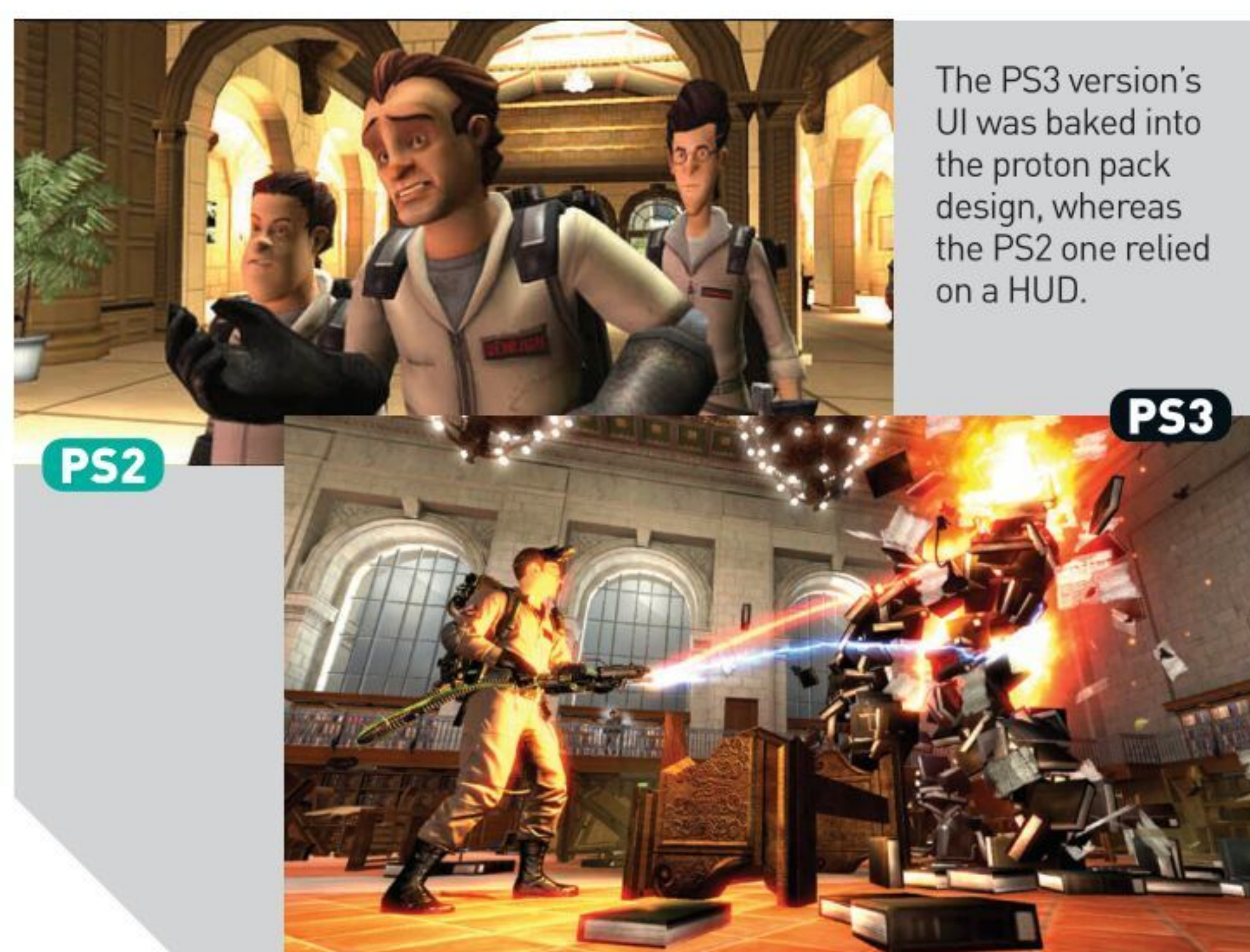
07 Despite arriving some months after the PS3 version was released, the PS2 version of this musou entry actually had extra content, in the form of additional characters with different weapons and movesets so that they weren't just reskins, plus additional levels. These extras, however, weren't enough to compensate for the fact that the outdated hardware simply couldn't handle the scale of the enormous battles, with PS2 suffering from lots of heavy slowdown and poorer graphics. Abilities you had on PS3, such as duelling and swimming, were also cut from this port.



Spider-Man 3

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** ATARI / **DEV** TREYARCH (PS3), VICARIOUS VISIONS (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2007

08 Tying in with the Sam-Raimi-directed film of the same name, this cross-gen release was no doubt aimed at reaching as broad an audience of Spidey fans as possible, though the major differences between the two console versions drew a lot of criticism at the time. Most significant was that on PS2 combat was largely ground-based, whereas on PS3 you could swing around in the open world. Sticking to the plot of the movie, on PS3 you couldn't remove the symbiote suit once you had it, whereas on PS2 you could, and in fact wearing it for too long would lead to a game over.



Ghostbusters: The Video Game

FORMAT PS3, PS2, PSP / **PUB** ATARI INTERACTIVE / **DEV** TERMINAL REALITY (PS3), RED FLY STUDIO (PS2, PSP) / **RELEASED** 2009

09 Who you gonna call? The most obvious difference between the two generations of Ghostbusters is that on PS3 the iconic foursome were modelled on the film's actors, who also provided the voices, whereas on the older tech the game had a more cartoonish look. That said, you got to pick your gender as the rookie protagonist in the PS2 and PSP versions. The campaigns also differed in level design, UI, and mechanics, but more importantly, multiplayer was only available on the PS3 version via online.



FIFA 14

FORMAT PS4, PS3, PS2, PSP, PSV / **PUB** EA SPORTS
DEV EA CANADA / **RELEASED** 2013

10 With 14 instalments released on PS2, EA truly committed to supporting FIFA fans who hadn't upgraded their console for years with legacy editions of its annual footie release, which boiled down to little more than updating the player rosters and stats, while the graphics stayed about a decade old. FIFA 14 was unusual not only for being the final FIFA game released for PS2 but also for being released across three PlayStation generations, with the PS4 version using the Ignite engine, introducing more advanced AI and 'True Player Motion'.

DEFENDING

Monokuma

Luke Kemp is bear-y sure that this murderous teddy isn't a load of pooh

This adorable little murderer is a mystery wrapped in an enigma wrapped in an unforgettable character design. A series of robots remote controlled by a human killer? A talking bear with a series of mechanical doubles? A sentient AI with an endless supply of self-destructing bear avatars? Three games later, we still don't know.

The third game serves only to deepen the mystery. Whoever or whatever Monokuma is, they are a killer. Of high school students, no less! Yet it's easy to forget (or, at least, deprioritise) this while playing Danganronpa. There's a playful yet malicious bounce to their voice, and that laugh – puhuhuhu! – is never far away. More important than the killing to Monokuma's identity, arguably, are the terrible puns that they throw all over the place. They'd fit right in at PLAY. You know, apart from the murdering and kidnapping.

That twisted humour is what makes the terrorising teddy equal parts appealing and frightening. Despite forcing a bunch of strangers into a deadly situation, Monokuma refuses to take it seriously. The whole thing is turned into a game, a series of actual murder mysteries that won't end until one person is left standing... or everybody is dead.

The killings – those committed by the cuddly mastermind, at least – are flamboyant, complicated, and infused with a dark humour. The bear personalises each according to the victim [*How... thoughtful? – ed*]. Monokuma's actions are impossible to defend, but the bear/robot/AI/person/whatever themselves? One of the most memorable villains in fiction, and very easy to celebrate.



IF YOU CAN FIGURE OUT 'WHODUNNIT', THEN ONLY THEY WILL RECEIVE PUNISHMENT! BUT, IF YOU PICK THE WRONG ONE, THEN I'LL PUNISH EVERYONE BESIDES THE BLACKENED."

Monokuma knows how to motivate you.



INFO

MAIN GAMES

Danganronpa:
Trigger
Happy Havoc,
Danganronpa 2:
Goodbye Despair,
Danganronpa V3:
Killing Harmony

STATS

Monokuma's English-language actor is Brian Beacock, who has also acted in anime including Bleach and Naruto.

Monokuma was, for some reason, used to help promote Seth MacFarlane's film Ted in Japan.

An early design of the character was a more human, and frankly more disturbing, figure.

SPIN-OFFS

Danganronpa
Another Episode:
Ultra Despair
Girls, Cyber
Danganronpa VR:
The Class Trial,
Danganronpa:
Unlimited Battle
(mobile, Japan
only, discontinued)

HOW TO PLAY?

Danganronpa 1/2
Reload (first two
games), \$54.95,
PlayStation Store;
Danganronpa V3:
Killing Harmony,
\$54.95, PlayStation
Store

A BRIEF HISTORY OF Naughty Dog

PlayStation's best friend has been around since the beginning



Naughty Dog's first project was a 16-bit RPG for EA, Rings Of Power. Never rereleased, it's since become a rarity.



Mortal Kombat-like Way Of The Warrior got Mark Cerny's attention. He signed the studio up to develop for Universal.



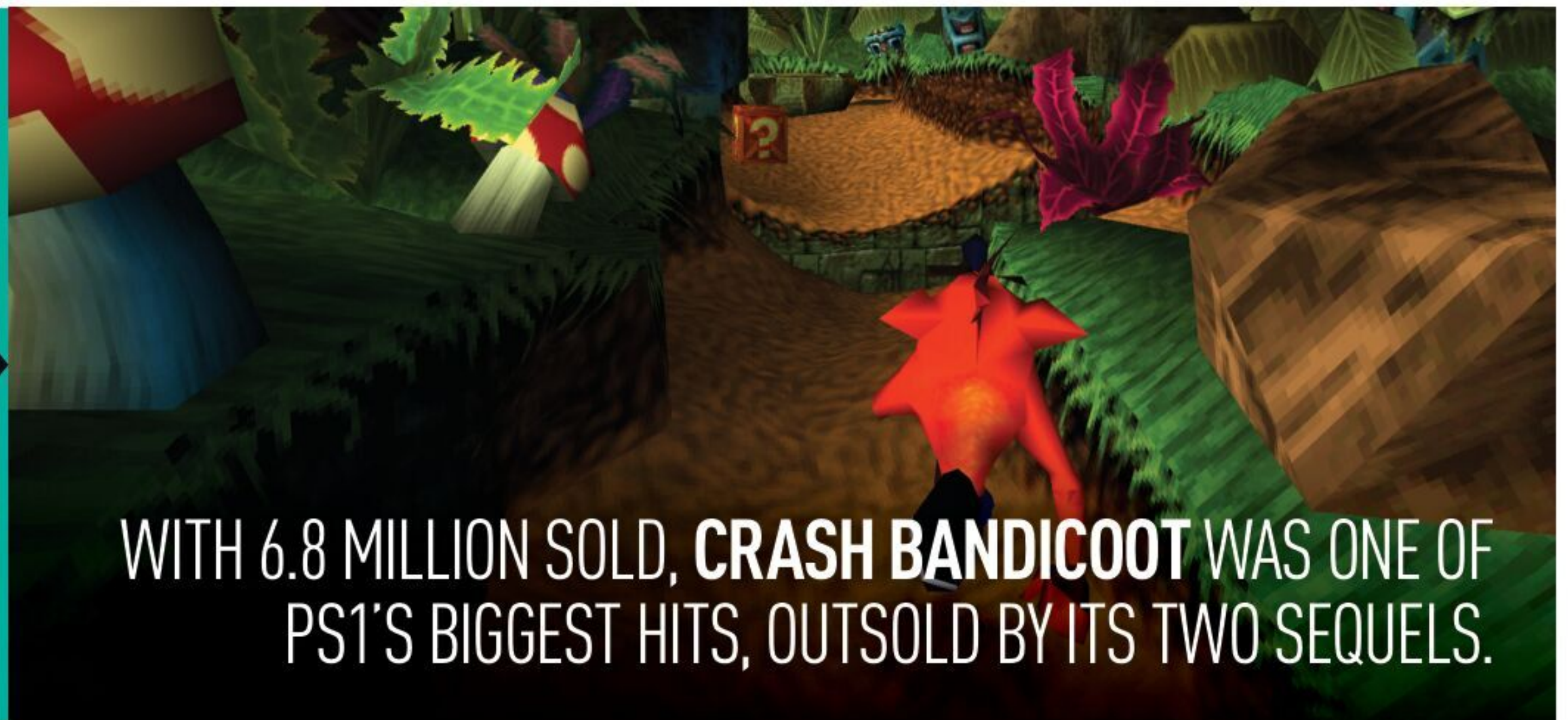
Between CTR and Jak X, Naughty Dog has a reputation for kart racers. When will Nathan Drake join the race?

Reformed from JAM Software in 1989. Sony purchased it in 2001 to focus on first-party games like Jak. **Controversially, the studio has long shunned having producers.** It never made a PSP/Vita game – spin-offs were handled by other devs.

CRASH TEST

Everybody jump around

Signed to Universal by Mark Cerny, Naughty Dog wanted to use the position to crack 3D platformers. Professional cartoonists worked on Crash's design, and impressive programming pushed PS1 like nothing else. Advanced texture compression and visual calculations meant a lot of visible detail, and the impression of a huge, vibrant platformer world.



WITH 6.8 MILLION SOLD, **CRASH BANDICOOT** WAS ONE OF PS1'S BIGGEST HITS, OUTSOLD BY ITS TWO SEQUELS.



■ TLOU was the first time ND had two full teams working on multiple projects.



■ Jak And Daxter had an impressively seamless open world back on PS2.



■ The studio got its online multiplayer start with Uncharted 2, which featured both co-op missions and rather excellent competitive modes.



■ Home of the ICE (Initiative for a Common Engine) team, ND creates shared tools that unify Sony's first-party studios. It's incredibly important.



BEYOND GAMING

From one screen to another

The likes of spin-off comics are not enough: Naughty Dog has become PlayStation Studios' spearhead for both the big and small screen. This year's Uncharted movie has been one of the most successful videogame movies ever, and next year's The Last Of Us HBO show looks like it'll land with a bang. Will Jak And Daxter be next?

Blood and thunder

Horizon Zero Dawn throws us up against Redmaw, a notorious war machine with no time for hunters

FORMAT PS4 / **PUB** SONY / **DEV** GUERRILLA GAMES / **RELEASED** 2017

Thunderjaws are among the biggest, meanest robots in Horizon Zero Dawn – bipedal mechatronics with crushing mandibles and spines bristling with firepower. And no Thunderjaw is as tough as Redmaw, which has left a string of would-be hunters mangled in its wake. Now it falls to Aloy to bring this giant machine to its knees.

Before you can pursue Redmaw, you have to get embroiled in local politics. First you must demonstrate your hunting prowess to become a

junior member of the Hunters' Lodge, under the wing of 'Hawk' Talanah. Then you can help Talanah claim the prize of beating Redmaw, so she can become lodge leader ahead of her unpleasant rival, Ahsis. Although he tricks Talanah to reach Redmaw first, the beast swipes him aside, giving you a shot at glory.

The main difference between this fight and other Thunderjaw encounters is that there's nowhere to hide in the open battleground, to cushion yourself from Redmaw's firepower and trample attacks. By

now, though, you'll be used to using all the weapons in your inventory, which is good because you need to hit it with pretty much everything you've got. Set explosive trip wires and mines, for example, to shatter Redmaw's underside armour, then take aim with tearblast arrows to prise off its arsenal, not least the vicious back-mounted disc launcher which you can dislodge then heave into your grasp. Deploying this will leave you immobile, but nothing in Horizon is as satisfying as giving the brute a taste of its own medicine. ■

TIME TO PLAY?

The meeting with Redmaw comes after a series of side-quests attached to the Hunters' Lodge, which include collecting trophies for destroying particularly tough machines. You probably won't complete this optional story until late in the game.

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE 21 NOVEMBER



SONIC FRONTIERS

Pace, the final frontier – Sonic's new adventure reviewed



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